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LOVE OR MARRIAGE?

VOLUME I.

LOVE OR MARRIAGE?

A Novel.

75479

WILLIAM BLACK.

IN THREE VOLS.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
TINSLEY BROTHERS, 18, CATHERINE ST., STRAND.
1868.

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LONDON:
WYMAN AND SONS, PRINTERS, GREAT QUEEN STREET,
LINCOLN'S-INN FIELDS, W.C.

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LOVE OR MARRIAGE?

CHAPTER I.

THE FLAMING SWORD.

ON the evening of a sultry day in July, 1865, a man of about thirty years of age, well dressed, and carrying in his hand two pretty large volumes, lingered about the corner of a small street leading off Clapham Road. He was rather under the middle stature, broad-shouldered, and well built. His pale complexion, thickly-matted curly black hair, and slightly hooked nose, would have suggested Jewish origin, but for the English sharpness and clearness of his dark eyes, which

gave intelligence and light to an otherwise rather uninteresting face. He walked listlessly up and down, apparently looking out for some one; occasionally beguiling the time by glancing, as well as the dull light would allow, into one of the books which he carried.

Suddenly these books fell from his hand, he uttered a slight exclamation, and his face became overspread by a look of intense terror. His eyes were fixed, with a sort of glazed fascination, upon the opposite side of Clapham Road; while his whole frame, paralyzed and trembling, was only supported by his right hand being clenched nervously and unconsciously round one of the railings at his back.

It was but a momentary spasm. He turned quickly to see if any one had observed him; picked up the books from

the pavement; and then, with a bitter smile upon his bloodless lips, passed further down the narrow thoroughfare at the corner of which he had been standing.

He turned again: there was no one in sight but a crossing-sweeper, an old woman who sat huddled up on two or three stones.

"And I am a journalist in the nineteenth century!" he muttered to himself, still with that bitter sneer on his face. "Perhaps I ought to preface my lecture on Comte to-morrow evening by saying that after one has laboured for a dozen years to clear one's mind of all the religious and metaphysical cobwebs which indigestion has bred in the brains of man, that after one has spent the best part of a lifetime in cutting the root-strings of superstition and prejudice, the happy result will be to find one's self a big

schoolboy ready at any moment to be frightened by ghosts!"

He looked down the street and across Clapham Road.

"Gone! How courteous! Suppose I turn Swedenborgian, and publish an account of the vision. If Charlie Bennett comes up now, shall I not call him to witness that this clammy perspiration on my hands and face—this definite product of my tangible body—this transformation of certain meats and drinks that I have paid for and swallowed—has actually come forth, unbidden, because of a spectre? If I could only play on the accordian, I might make my fortune, as a medium, by gratifying those persons who have no great faith in another world unless when it touches their toes beneath a table."

But this inward whistling to keep his

courage up was not very successful. In spite of his scornful logic, his eyes would turn in a certain direction, the perspiration, cold and prominent, would come upon his forehead, his hand (which was bleeding from his having struck it against the railings) would tremble.

"Why does the fellow wait?" he muttered angrily. "If a flirtation with this old botanist's daughter is going to cause me such annoyances, why, I'll drop it! Perhaps the kindly ghost appeared to warn me against the folly of accepting her ridiculous challenge. But I have accepted it; and I will see her in her own house; and her own sweetheart shall be the person to lead me on to the cheap victory. What fools men are!"

Presently he was saluted by a light, cheerful voice, and there came up a handsome young fellow, rather negligently

dressed, with long, light-brown, wavy hair, falling back almost upon his shoulders, a florid, pleasant, sun-burned face, and with an appearance of much loose, ill-shaped, unformed energy about the easy swing of his head and arms.

"I'm very sorry to have kept you waiting, Helstone; but there was a big fire at the corner of the New Cut, and I got off the 'bus to see it. Then I couldn't get another Clapham 'bus until I came to the Gate; and then I thought I might as well walk all the way, and have fourpence more for to-morrow's dinner. What a fine thing it must be to be independent of costs!"

"Where is Glencairn's house?" asked the other, who had suddenly become grave and collected.

"There," said the young man, in his rattling style. "Come along! I told him to expect us at any hour, so he will not be

vexed at our being late. But he's never vexed at anything, unless you upset some of his plants. I think you said you had met Miss Glencairn?"

"I did not. I said I had seen her."

"Oh, indeed. All right. I'll introduce you."

So they went up to the house, and entered.

Mr. Helstone was left in the drawing-room, while the younger man went to see whether the owner of the house was ready to receive the stranger. In a few minutes a servant came to Helstone, asked him to follow her to Mr. Glencairn's room upstairs; and therupon led him through a small parlour in which an elderly lady and a young girl were seated.

There was a sudden twinkle of recognition, like the splintering of glass, in those big, childlike blue eyes: then they were

bent modestly, discreetly upon the ground; and Christian Helstone, replying in no way to this electric signal of welcome, passed tho girl and entered her father's study. Not even her mother had noticed that swift glance.

It was a strange, dim little room, filled with a peculiar perfume as of dried bracken. A fern-case outside the window dulled and cooled the ruddy western light that had now broken through the dense pall of grey cloud, and steeped in a vague haze of gloom the many singular implements and curiosities of the chamber. Here were dusty books; there a litter of microscopic slides, bits of drying paper, and shreds of plants; against the wall stood a large cabinet, the open doors of which revealed its twin rows of carefully labelled shelves, reaching from the lofty altitudes of the full fine-blown *Ranuncu-*

laceæ down to the ignominious and mysterious depths of *Rhodosporeæ;* while, if you would go still deeper, there, before you on the table, stood a large microscope, from which James Glencairn had just risen to receive his second visitor.

A tall, rather narrow-chested man, with the sallow face and nervous temperament of a Highland Celt; a man whose native energy of character had too evidently been overweighted by the dark and moody speculation which was written on the broad but not high forehead, and in the deep-set, unutterably sad eyes. Strange eyes these were, full of a mild benignity, but full also of a brooding melancholy which gave a certain subdued tone to all the man's actions; and it was with a somewhat mournful and grave courtesy that he rose to welcome his present guests.

"You see, Mr. Glencairn," said Bennett,

passing his white fingers a little nervously through his flaxen hair, "I have brought Mr. Helstone to see you, as I promised."

Bennett, confused himself, thought this awkward introduction a source of uneasiness both to his friend and to the old stern-faced botanist. He was mistaken. That sudden sparkle of astonishment in Fanny Glencairn's pretty eyes had been the prize which Helstone had sought to win; and pleased with the success of his bold adventure, he was ready to pay court to her father with an extreme simplicity of purpose. He was quite at his ease. He took a chair which Mr. Glencairn offered him. He gently put aside one or two books which were in his way; and began a frank and pointed conversation.

"Really, Mr. Glencairn, I should tell you that I have no special inquiries to make; and that I have for a long time wished to

form your acquaintance simply that I might know one who, by another road than mine, has been trying to—to reach, in fact, the stronghold of ultimate truth. Indeed, I hope to hear of a new gospel in the microscope."

Half an hour before, he had said to himself, "*She has challenged me to enter her father's house, and I am about to do so:*" now it was a new gospel in the microscope which was uppermost in his mind.

"So you hope to detect God in the motion of chlorophyl granules?" said Glencairn, with the same sad smile again coming over his face. "I'm afraid all our scientific avenues lead only to the one sea, and there we have to take ship and begin a different voyage."

Helstone, with a graceful and easy lucidity, began to explain his views upon that and other subjects; running smoothly

and limpidly along, until, somehow or other, he discovered that he was arguing with a shadow. Why would these mournful eyes stare him out of countenance? What was it in this tall, almost silent man that awed him and constrained him, that made him feel he was in presence of one who was far and away beyond the utmost limits of his thinking? What was that strange power visible—or that he, in the gathering dusk of the chamber, fancied was visible—in the old man's seamed and sallow face, and in the sunken, deep grey eyes?—a power such as that which the Israelites recognized when their prophets returned to them from the wilderness, when they whispered amongst themselves, "He has been talking with God." The stream of conversation trickled less fluently; there were occasional pauses, then long stoppages; and Charlie, seated

in one corner of the gloomy little apartment, would fain have been in the next room with Fanny and her mother. Discussions about theories of creation were tedious to the poor lad who sat there listening to the stepping of a pair of tiny feet, and to the sound of a sweet voice which stirred all the blood in his heart, which made him forget the darkness, and the men before him, and forced him to wish the lost intermediate species (where they probably are) at the bottom of the sea.

For several seconds a dead silence reigned: Christian Helstone felt himself mesmerised. He was no mere talker, be it observed; no mere voluble mediocrity; but a man who by the white light of a certain intelligence, had striven to purge his soul of prejudice. A sound-reasoning, clear-headed, logical man, whose

intellect—which might be called a sort of House of Commons intellect—was, so far as it went, eminently workable and unerring in its action; a man who ruled his conduct wholly by theories of his own making, in the evolution of which he showed a singular ingenuity. What must he, then, have thought of this strange being who declared in that quiet, half-mournful way of his that "no man knew anything of God who had not been alone by night among the Highland hills?" and that the effort to demonstrate religious truth by metaphysical formula, was like trying to discover God by the use of the multiplication table?

These men were of different epochs: no wonder that a dead silence fell between them.

In despair, Charlie Bennett started up, and hinted, in a confused way, that he

would like to see Mrs. Glencairn in the next room. At once the old botanist rose, and apologizing to Mr. Bennett for "keeping him in that drumly place," begged him to come into the parlour, where no pet plants prevented the use of gas.

"With pleasure," said Mr. Helstone, blandly.

As the door was opened, a blinding glare of light fell upon them, and Helstone caught a glimpse of as rosy and bright a little picture as the eyes of man could wish to see. Since he had gone into Mr. Glencairn's study, tea had been laid in the small parlour adjoining, and Mrs. Glencairn and her daughter were ready to take their places at the table; while the strong light of the gasalier fell upon a face and figure which seemed to have leapt alive from the canvas of an eighteenth-century French picture. A

keen observer might have noticed just a touch of alarm in the young girl's eyes as she rose, with some little constraint, to be introduced to the stranger.

No piece of stage-acting could have been more perfect. Both of them bowed slightly and coldly: two passers by in Fleet Street could not have regarded each other with more complete indifference.

They sat down to tea, and Mr. Helstone found himself opposite this vision of girlish grace that he could have fancied stolen from some dim glade of Arthurian romance, to display the daintiest of white little wrists in handing teacups in Clapham. It was not the fine cluster of short, thick, pale yellow curls that fell down on a shapely and milk-white neck, nor the dimpled, rose-tinted cheek, nor the clear brow, nor the bright, big, beautiful

blue eyes that gave an almost infantine expression to her face, but a certain fine modulation of colour, and a subtle and attractive natural grace, that drew his eyes and heart to her, and made him forget the rather theatrical character of her beauty. Besides, she wore a jacket of scarlet velvet, with a little ermine collar, which was not half so white as the chin under which it nestled; and although this resplendent bit of dress was now sadly tarnished by age and wear, it nevertheless completed the semi-theatrical, semi-artistic look of the graceful little figure.

When, in the course of conversation, Helstone and she had to exchange words, they bore the demeanour of perfect strangers. Indeed she purposely avoided paying even ordinary attention to him, much to Charlie's disappointment, who

was anxious that his new friend should appear well in the eyes of his mistress.

"It isn't every evening," he said, in his blundering way, determined to turn the talk towards Helstone, "that we have a literary man to enliven us."

Fanny preserved a decorous silence.

"I can assure you, Mr. Bennett," said Helstone, with a smile which showed his white teeth, "from what I know of literary men, that their conversation is always dull when it isn't blasphemous."

"Then I fear we should prefer its being dull," said James Glencairn, gravely.

"Indeed, Mr. Glencairn," said Helstone, "how should we wish our literary men to be more satirical? When the satire of a country becomes remarkable, it is a sure sign that the country is on the brink of decadence; and we ought to be glad that England, in that

respect, is becoming healthier every day."

Charlie looked across the table at Fanny. She prettily played with her teaspoon; she used the most endearing of little phrases to the great grey tom-cat; she was too beautiful, too self-possessed, too complete to care for the supplementary charms of flattery and admiration. Nor would she reward Mr. Helstone with the tiniest of smiles.

Christian Helstone, meanwhile, was striving to be as amusing and vivacious as possible. He had almost forgotten the terrible circumstance which had prefaced his arrival; he had wholly forgotten "the gospel of the microscope." He told pointed anecdotes of Royal persons; he told funny stories of his newspaper experiences; he talked science to Mr. Glencairn; and adroitly ridiculed, for the

enjoyment of Mrs. Glencairn, the cumbersome verbiage he had to employ. Glencairn, with a grave, perplexed smile on his face, listened to the brilliant talk of this new friend; Mrs. Glencairn—the grand woman, with the cold, severe look—was gratified to find that at least one person whom her husband received at his house, was a gentleman.

But what of Charlie?—and wherefore the strange look of alarm that had at length drawn away his attention from Fanny's eyes? During the conversation he had become conscious of the loss of a lucky farthing which Fanny had given him, and by no searching in his pockets could he recover it. A precious talisman it was; for she had kissed it, and vowed that so long as he kept it he should retain with it her love. Nay—for why should I not tell the truth?—had she not, at his

request, strung a bit of string through the dingy little coin; and, having so hung it round her neck, slept with it next her gentle heart until it was supposed to be permeated by the subtle kindliness which beat so placidly for him there; so that when she gave it him, he received it as a sacred thing, and many a time had blessed its little brown face in moments of black despair, when it alone seemed to give him hope that the capricious Fanny would once more turn and yearn for her own true love?

Superstition is the special gift of lovers; and Charlie, almost unconsciously, began to connect the loss of his farthing with the appearance of Christian Helstone.

That was the first step.

The next was to take a clear leap into the fatal highroad of suspicion. He began to observe—what no one but an

idiot or a lover could so long have failed to perceive—that Fanny, notwithstanding her careful avoidance of looking at either himself or Helstone, was playing her pretty wiles *at* the stranger.

Was he so anxious now that she should appear to great advantage? Why, the very charm of these wiles appalled him; and how very charming they were! Was there ever a kitten so full of comic originality; was there ever a squirrel so demure and decorous, so sly and wicked; was there ever a fairy with limelight quivering on her pink satin and silver spangles, so tenderly beautiful as this tantalising sweetheart? Her little, white, warm hand, that seemed to tingle to the finger-tips with a delicious life, was enough to have stolen a man's heart away: and then her plump, finely-tinted face; her short, thick, natural curls; and—ah! most dangerous

of all—her awful eyes, that looked out upon you as with a great childlike wonder, that drew you towards them, that made you quail before their inexpressible depth and tenderness, then burst out laughing at you for a fool, and cut the strings of your heart as with an edge of steel!

"You *will* not tell me where Sierra Leone is," she laughingly whimpered, "and then you say I ought to be ashamed of myself for not knowing. How am I ever to know?"

"Don't be ridiculous, Fanny," said her mother, in her pompous way; "we have enough of these childish pretences at other times."

"There again," said Fanny, with her colour somewhat heightened; "you will not tell me, and then you blame me for not knowing!"

She was about to ring the bell at this

time, and as she passed Mrs. Glencairn's chair, she slipped her arm gently round her neck, and brought her cheek close down to her mother's face.

"You won't send me to bed because I don't know where Sierra Leone is, will you?" she said, coaxingly, and kissing the cold, impassive cheek that she knew would soon relax into a smile; "for how can I be better than you teach me to be? Do you remember how angry you were with me, mammy, for saying I hated operatic music, and liked waltzes, and polkas, and things that were not all shrieks and stamps?"

Her mother fell an easy prey to the charmer; and while she kissed her in return, Helstone's mind jumped to a theory.

I need not here place on record the ingenious defence of Fanny's uncultivated

taste he made, nor how he proved that music without melody was like the letters in the alphabet without arrangement. It is sufficient for our purpose to quote his last saying.

"Why," he cried, "I'd rather hear 'Kate Kearney' sung by an Irish girl than listen to the most brilliant piece of recitative performed by the choir of Heaven, with the apostle Peter as first tenor."

Fanny was about to laugh when she caught her father's eye.

"Mr. Helstone," said James Glencairn, calmly, "you will think it singular of me to object to such phrases being used in my house; but, you see, we have been educated in such a thick mist of prejudice that we cannot quite clear our eyes, and——"

"I'm sure I beg your pardon, Mr. Glencairn," said Helstone, with his face

hot as fire. "I certainly did not intend to say anything which would hurt you."

"You are unusually cross to-night, my dear," said Mrs. Glencairn, with a sort of grand contempt in her tone.

"Cross?" said the old man, mildly, "I'm sorry for that. But Mr. Helstone will yield a little to our poor weaknesses. You see, sir, it is so difficult to get rid of old and stupid notions of reverence for what is unknown to us, that I almost begin to despair of curing myself. I dare say you know how species which have been formed by difference of temperature withstand all our efforts to lead them back again through perceptible gradations: so it is with us, I fear. Atmospheric influences may have so clouded our minds as to make them reverent—it is a misfortune we cannot help."

Every word stung Helstone like a whip,

for he alone recognized the delicate irony which lay under the old man's assumed meekness.

Charlie strove to reintroduce the cheerfulness which Helstone's unlucky epigram had dispelled; but in vain. Shortly thereafter they rose to leave; while Fanny went into another room to fetch a book for Charlie.

"I hope you will come to see me again," said James Glencairn, frankly extending his hand to Helstone, "and we will try to be tolerant of each other's habits."

"When I come again," said Helstone, "I shall endeavour not to offend a delicacy which I very sincerely respect."

Charlie went out first. Fanny was in the passage, and gave him the book with a kiss, and a whispered "Good-night, darling."

Helstone, coming next, was dismissed with a squeeze of the hand; but the hand

left behind it a little crumpled bit of paper, bearing these words: "*How dare you have come here to-night? I will never forgive you.*"

Charlie had not observed Helstone wait to read this enigma, and, turning round, began to reproach him for his tardiness.

"By the way, Helstone," he said, "you looked very unwell when I met you to-night. I did not speak of it until I should see whether it was a merely temporary thing or not; and now, do you know, you seem quite to have changed your expression since you came out. Do you feel sick?"

Helstone thrust his arm within his friend's, and as they passed on, said, with a smile,

"I am liable to a slight disorder of the digestive organs, that in me exhibits itself by a susceptibility to childish fears and superstitions. I had just passed through

such an attack when I saw you, though I need not tell you the particular horror that had then presented itself to me."

He shuddered slightly as he spoke, and his face and eyes assumed a very different expression to that they had borne in Mr. Glencairn's house. Perhaps it was a reaction after his forced cheerfulness, or that Charlie's question had more vividly recalled the subject to his mind; but all the way home he was reticent and gloomy, speaking hardly a word. During part of this homeward journey they were on the top of an omnibus, and while Charlie was revenging himself upon the silence of his friend by humming, "Je veux entendre encore ta douce voix," he felt his arm grasped convulsively.

He turned, and saw Helstone, with a face white as death, looking up into the clear dark-blue vault above them.

"You can see nothing up there, I

suppose?" said his companion, with another of those hard smiles upon his face.

"Nothing but the ordinary stars."

"Look at the end of the Plough—then draw a line from the last two stars up there to the Pole-star—I suppose you don't see a faint pink light, just like a sword of flame, along that line? You don't see it? I thought so. Would to Heaven I had the courage to tear my eyes out, that go making a fool of me like this!"

Before they had reached his home, they descended from the 'bus; and Helstone, entering the nearest public-house, hastily drank off a glass of raw brandy. A more lifelike colour came to his pale cheeks, and he recovered somewhat his composure.

"Don't you think it would drive most

men mad?" he suddenly asked Bennett. "I knew I should see something like that after what I saw this evening. The one thing always follows the other, perhaps because I expect it. But of all the absurdities in creation none beats that of a man who is compelled, against his reason and will, to believe in the supernatural—all through a defective stomach or a weak pair of eyes!"

"But what was it like?" said Charlie Bennett, who seemed to be more frightened than his friend.

"Like!" said Helstone; "I cannot tell you what the ordinary thing I see is like, or the horror of it would kill you. But this accidental thing of a sword seemed like a long broad line and a shorter transverse one, throbbing with minute points of crimson—a sort of dust of flame that altered every minute in its intensity and

colour—sometimes a deep scarlet, and sometimes only a faint rose-tinge that was almost invisible. Of course I know what produced it—a pressure of blood in the arteries on the inner surface of the iris; only, if I was quite sure that nothing else would produce such a feeling, I believe I should gouge out both my eyes where I stand. For the thing is too ridiculous in this particular age of the world."

CHAPTER II.

FANNY'S DREAM.

JAMES GLENCAIRN married when he was twenty-three. He was the son of a Mid-Lothian farmer, who had resolved to give him some education and a business in Edinburgh, chiefly because he was of no use at home. While his two brothers were retained on the farm, James was dispatched to the great northern city; and here, at college, picked up a little Latin, which he straightway employed in a way so as almost to drive his old father crazy. He spent all his leisure hours in solitary rambles outside the town; he neglected those friends who might have been valu-

able to him; he fell madly in love with a gardener's daughter—a weak little thing who died when their courtship was at its sweetest; he began to be known as a botanist—a student of the most unprofitable study on the face of the earth.

At this juncture Miss Flora Montgarnet, a young English lady on a visit to Edinburgh, took him and married him; his father bought him an ironmongery business; he started life under at least tolerable auspices. He had a young and beautiful wife, whose interest in his welfare was not lessened by her eager desire to prove to her English relatives that her marriage was not a *mésalliance*. He, too, was young; he was admired everywhere for his frank and winning ways; he was proud of her; and she, in turn, looked forward with a beating heart to the time when they should together leave this

northern wilderness, and go down to overwhelm her rich southern friends with the conviction of the great wrong they had done her.

That satisfaction she had never reaped, and now her hair was grey. James Glencairn was not fitted to be a successful trader: he had a sensitive conscience, and a horror of sharp practice. The great increase in the business never arrived. The funds wherewith he was to purchase a few mines grew more and more visionary. Year after year his business receipts became smaller; and year after year the efforts made by Mrs. Glencairn and Fanny (when the latter had grown old enough to help) to preserve an outwardly decent appearance became more trying.

At length, however, they were in a manner compelled to move to London, though not in that triumphal state which

Mrs. Glencairn had so faithfully hoped for; and the reason of their exodus was this. James Glencairn had grown to be a Pariah in the eyes of the particular section of the Edinburgh people among whom he lived. There were rumours abroad concerning him. He was considered to be dangerously unsound on the doctrine of election. He had been heard to speak slightingly of the Moderator of the Free Kirk Synod—a gentleman whose vehemence on the subject of eternal punishment would have led one to believe that he had a quite personal interest in damning everybody for ever. He was suspected of seeking to undermine revelation by the use of his big microscope; and he had been once seen to pick on a Sunday afternoon, from the slopes of up (a flower) Salisbury Crags. Finally, he published a pamphlet on the *Bryology of Arran*, and there said or hinted something

about the evolution of new species which raised such a storm about his ears that the unhappy ironmonger and botanist was glad to take refuge in the most liberal city the world knows—liberal alike in politics, religion, and social ethics—London.

Behold him, therefore, in London—living in the remote suburb of Clapham, with a modest ironmongery warehouse in Oxford Street, and with an insatiable hunger for woods and country lanes that is rapidly ruining a business never very lucrative. Mrs. Glencairn has now almost lost her ambition: the bitter teachings of a stern economy have tamed her hopes. She looks on impassively, and, without protest, sees her daughter—for whom alone she would fain anticipate a somewhat better future—about to become engaged to this Charlie Bennett, who is not even an artist, but a mere student in art. At the outside he

cannot sell more than sixty pounds' worth of rough landscapes a year; and a goodly part of that sum goes to pay his subscription to a life-class in the neighbourhood of Hampstead Road. Altogether, the small household is not in a flourishing condition; but it is at least quiet, comfortable, and united.

The visit of Christian Helstone was repeated; this time without the attendance of Charlie Bennett. In the course of a week or two he began to be looked for; and, indeed, there never were wanting ingenious excuses for these little calls. He spoke, in almost a touching way, of the delicious retirement one experienced in escaping from the roaring wilds of London into this quiet fold in Clapham. He won the favour of both Mr. and Mrs. Glencairn by his modest affability. He flattered, in the slyest way, the big, proud, goodnatured

woman. He asked her opinion of the smart articles in the *Daily Scorpion*, and she knew they were his own. He paid her little attentions which were to her valuable as coming from one who was not merely a literary man, but a gentleman, whose private property and distinguished friends gave him a title to her consideration. Towards Mr. Glencairn, on the other hand, he bore a childlike reverence; and listened with a fascinated attention which was not wholly assumed to the strange, dreamy, semi-scientific, semi-theological speculations of the old man. Sharp and ready were his replies sometimes—transfixing, as it were, this or that vague abstraction of faith on a clear steel skewer of reason; and James Glencairn, from this lofty garret region of philosophic speculation, could only look down with a sort of compassionate pleasure on this new, keen-

witted friend whose mental efforts were always lateral, never vertical.

And while in Mrs. Glencairn's parlour, Helstone seemed to regard Fanny with a quite paternal fondness. He perplexed her with odd questions; he laughed away her tiny superstitions; he praised her music, not with the blushing reticence of a lover, but with the easy goodnature of a parent. He humoured her whims; but it was in a droll way which amused her, and made her half-ashamed of them. She began to relish this pleasant fillip which was given to the monotony of their lives; she trusted to that serenity of disposition which he always had; she learned to respect his vexatious mocking of herself as a proof of disinterested goodness; and she began to wish that Charlie Bennett would apply himself a little more eagerly to his work, and not waste so

much of his time in Mrs. Glencairn's parlour.

One evening Mr. Helstone asked Fanny and her mother to share with him a box at the opera which he had taken for the following night.

"It is the sort of music you will like," he said, with no apparent sarcasm, to Fanny. "It is 'Martha.'"

"My favourite opera!" she cried, involuntarily throwing up her hands and clasping them in theatrical delight.

They went to the opera, and Mrs. Glencairn, proud and pleased, was in her grandest attire. Fanny, timid and conscious, would scarcely peep round at the rows of brilliant faces; but there was not an article of her dress which had not been carefully studied. She knew that her nose was not aristocratic, and that it was impossible for her to aim at that severe

simplicity of costume which suited finer-looking women; but she knew also that there was a colour and a light about her which atoned for such disadvantages, and she knew that there were not in the theatre such another pair of eyes as hers, and such another head of natural curls.

When they returned home at midnight, the maid informed them that Mr. Bennett having called, Mr. Glencairn had gone out with him about nine o'clock, and had not returned.

"As usual!" said Mrs. Glencairn, with a scornful toss of her head.

Presently Mr. Glencairn came back, alone, with rather a sad and worn look about the eyes. He sate down by Fanny's side, and put his arm round her.

"Well, my girl," he said, "and what do you think of the theatre?"

"Oh, splendid!" she cried; adding,

demurely, "but you know, Pappy, I felt just a wee bit of an impostor, as if I had no right to be among all those rich people. And I think I felt a little vexed that I couldn't meet them on equal terms."

"That is not *your* fault, my dear," said Mrs. Glencairn, with a bitter meaning in her tone.

"And where have you been, Pappy?" asked Fanny.

"I? Charlie and I went out for a little walk, and so we strolled up to the Common. Then he took the 'bus there; but I went on and sate down among the furze to have a look at the stars that I don't know much about beyond their names. Who was it—Ralph Erskine or Brown o' Haddington?—that said, 'I dinna care muckle to hae much knowledge o' the staurs i' my lifetime; for I'll hae a braw

glint o' them as I gang hame to my Faither's house.' "

"Not a bad rhetorical flourish," said Helstone, with a thin laugh, as he rose to bid them good-night.

Three days thereafter Charlie came over to see his sweetheart, and, as usual, they went out for a walk in the afternoon. That visit to the opera lay heavy on his mind; and she knew it; but within doors he had had no opportunity given him of disburdening himself. Now it was the custom of these young people, on going out for an afternoon, to step into one of the country omnibuses that leave the City by the Clapham Road, and, after travelling three or four miles by this conveyance, get out within a few minutes' walk of a pretty large wood through which a narrow by-path ran. Here they could, without fear of interruption, discourse of that tremen-

dous secret which lovers conceive to be unknown to all the rest of mankind, and talk those gentle commonplaces which, since the beginning of the world, have always acquired a startling originality and profundity of meaning at a particular time in every man's history.

And on this particular evening there was a sort of æsthetic sympathy in the very air that awoke the generosity of his nature, and dulled the keen edge of his complaint. He had been nursing his wrath during all the long jolting in the omnibus; but now, in the sweet, pure air, with the calm influences of evening overhead, how could he be angry? Knowing not what to say, and struggling with himself, he led her in silence down the narrow, rugged lane which led between the two long stripes of fir and birch.

"It is only when we two are here toge-

ther, Fanny," he said, "that I feel safe and happy."

He looked very strangely and wistfully then upon his companion. For at this time the western sunlight fell through the thick, dark branches in thin sheets of misty crimson; the brier-stalks and withered leaves and ferns of autumn burned like red flame; and away in the far east dwelt a pale green fire, encompassing the faint white crescent of the moon. It was indeed a time for lovers' talk; for in this universe of blended colour the young girl's face underwent a sort of transfiguration, until the heart of her companion was sick with fear lest the beautiful vision should pass away from him.

"You do not trust me," she said.

"I have trusted my life to you already," he said, in a low voice; "surely that is

enough. I know you would not seek to leave me: how could I ever think of such a thing? But it isn't that. Somehow I cannot tell you what I mean—but, if we were married, I should like to be able to look back upon every day and moment and year of your life as quite mine—to feel that no one else had ever the least bit of it. And even now I dread your being drawn away, ever so little, from the confidence that is between us; and you know yourself, darling, that when Helstone——"

"Now Charlie," she said, with a pout of vexation, "how can you go and tease me about nothing? The fact is, you are very fond of me, and you are very jealous; and nothing would satisfy you short of my marrying you to-morrow morning, and consenting to be locked up in a room all the rest of my life. It isn't possible for a woman to speak only to one man all her

life, even if he was quite a miracle of wisdom—and you know you're not that, my pet, or you wouldn't be so fond of me."

There was something in her tone so jarring, so out of harmony with the beautiful silence around them, with his dumb longings of affection, even with the child-like loveliness of her face, that he would not answer her. Seeing which, she continued, even more sharply—

"I think, Charlie, you have very little reason to complain of Mr. Helstone. Didn't you of your own accord bring him to see us? And, indeed, I am very glad you did; for I admire him very much, and I like his forbearance, and courtesy, and pleasant manners; and I should be sorry to be compelled to throw away his friendship. Why would you have me do so? He is old enough to be my father; and

you yourself must have noticed how very respectful and distant he is towards me. You are jealous even of my friends; and though you charge me with inconstancy, I suppose I must say nothing of your—selfishness."

"Fanny——!"

"Yes, selfishness. Do you think my life is too happy at home—with my father so lost in his studies that he takes no notice of what is going on, and with my mother visiting on me her revenge against the world? When Mr. Helstone comes in of an evening, he seems to smoothe down everything, and the house is quite comfortable. Why do you wish me to commit the rudeness of turning him away? You brought him."

They walked on for a moment or two in constrained silence. Passing between two great tangled masses of briers which lay

in a small hollow, one of the long, slender, thorny stems caught upon her dress; and she was removing it when another claw so deeply scratched her finger as to make the red blood jump to the surface and trickle down her hand. She bit her lip, said nothing, and doubled up her hand, though the blood still ran.

He, too, as obstinate every whit, would not yield the sympathy which she refused to ask. But he had not her strength of persistence.

"Let me see your hand," he said, coldly.

She held up the little, bleeding, white finger to him, and he pretended not to see that there were great tears coming into her eyes.

"I'm afraid I've vexed you, Charlie," she said, in a low voice, "and—and I'm very sorry for it."

He wiped the blood away from the finger, and kissed the wound, according to the superstitious habit of lovers, and, tearing up his handkerchief, carefully and tenderly bound a white strip round it—all in silence. It was his duty, and he did it; but to welcome back the errant sheep to his fold before she had sufficiently expressed her penitence was clearly beyond his duty.

Then all of a sudden he stooped down and kissed her.

"There," he said, "I can't quarrel with you, Fanny. You will have your way; and to the end of life I will be your slave. God knows it is all I hope for."

There was a touch of sadness in his voice that her fine womanly ear could not fail to detect.

She lifted her great tear-filled eyes to his face—and ah! how surpassingly beau-

tiful were they in that calm, full light of evening; and she said—

"When I forget how much you love me, Charlie, it will be worse for me than for you."

So that was the end of the quarrel. They went home; and after the rain came sunshine. For as they drew near to the dull city, that lay under a huge cloud of purple beneath the clear eastern green, he began to paint, with that splendid boyish enthusiasm which at a certain age makes all the earth and heavens beautiful, the wonderful deeds he was to achieve for the sake and in the service of this little queen. She was mostly silent; but there was pleasure in her eyes; and for that night at least he went home to his poor lodgings happy.

The same evening Fanny sat down and wrote the following letter, which, if the

attentive reader scan it, will reveal several things to him.

"Friday night.

"My dear Mr. Helstone,—

"This is my first letter to you; and why do I sit up to write to you, but that I know you will like to receive a letter from me, and that it pleases me to be able to speak freely with you? If I could only convince myself that it was not wrong for me to do so! I *fear* it is wrong: will you, who seem to know everything, tell me whether it is or no? And will you tell me if a girl may use the words '*my*' and '*dear*' to a gentleman without meaning anything? I never seemed to notice before that they did mean anything, and now I am quite afraid to use them. It is not more than an hour since I came home from a walk with Mr.

Bennett. He seems displeased that I should know you. When I think how very good and kind he is, I cannot but think that he is right in what he says; and I ask myself again and again why it is that I cannot at once tell you not to come to our house any more. Sometimes I do wish I had never seen you—a sort of shuddering comes over me—I tremble, and should like to hide myself in my mother's lap, but that she would laugh at me. Last night, too, I dreamed such a fearful dream. I saw Charlie standing on the other side of a river, stretching his arms towards me, and there were tears running down his cheeks. I tried to cross the river; but I felt myself caught back and carried away from the place; and then I saw him rush down the bank. He jumped into the black water, but it bore him on and on, until I could only see a

white face looking at me—and the eyes grew bigger—and oh! so sad they were—until I could only see a shadowy face and these eyes that looked out of a white mist at the end of the river. And then a boat came, and I felt myself drawn down to the water's edge, and the boat became a coffin. They laid me in it, and I floated down until I came to a great, black sea, with a red sky overhead; and all the waves of the sea were full of white faces that burned like phosphorus, and they seemed to laugh, but neither they nor the dashing of the waves made the least noise. I cried out for Charlie to come and save me from these faces; but I only heard a low rumble of thunder through the flaming sky. What does it all mean? I shrieked out so that mamma came rushing into my room, and found me sitting up in bed. Of course I had a good cry, and so it ended.

"Yes, I will meet you as you wish—for a few minutes, remember. I cannot refuse you such a little favour (if it be a favour at all), and indeed I wish to tell you something I do not care to put in writing; my duty towards Charlie has made me resolve upon this, and you will find how very clear and concise I can be when you do not puzzle me with cross-questions.

"Your sincere *sister*,

"FANNY."

CHAPTER III.

AN OFFER OF MARRIAGE.

ON the evening of the following day a private Hansom drove up to the door of the house in which Charlie Bennett lodged, which was situated in a small and dirty street leading off Hampstead Road. It was the nearest approach to Fitzroy Square that the poor artist could afford.

There stepped out of the cab a tall gentleman, of about sixty years of age, massively built, with erect, soldier-like bearing, and large moustache and whiskers of a rough, hoary whiteness. He was not less than six feet in height, and his advanced years seemed as little to lessen the

vigour and energy of his big frame as to dull the keen sparkle of his light blue eye.

He rapped at the door; the slatternly servant-maid involuntarily dropped him a curtsey, apparently in a great fright.

"Meester Bennett at home?" he asked, in a voice which would have been sharp and authoritative but for its soft, guttural German inflexion.

"Yes, sir," she said, dropping another curtsey, and then running upstairs.

The old gentleman followed her, and, on the second landing, opened the door of a large, bare, uncarpeted, dingy room, which was in a frightful litter of disarrangement and dust. On the solitary table stood a tray, with a shabby tea-service upon it, and on the tray and about the tray were oily, sticky colour tubes, smeared brushes, a pot of marmalade, an exhibi-

tion catalogue, some envelopes, a palette knife, &c., &c.; while round the dirty sides of the room, sketches of pictures, and torn canvases, and completed landscapes lay, or hung, or were propped up by resting partly on the floor and partly on the wall.

"Oh, sir, he isn't here," said the girl, with a frightened look, as if she expected to be immediately swallowed alive. "I—I forgot—he went out, sir, about a 'alf hour ago, sir."

"Tell him to come to my house as soon as he comes in."

"Yes, sir."

He stepped down the dark stair, met the landlady of the house, to whom he raised his hat in a stately manner, passed outside, and told his man to drive home.

This old gentleman was Friedrich Johann von Kirschenfeld, formerly holding

the rank of major in the *Landwehr* of the Prussian Guard-corps, and now peacefully living out the remainder of his life in Kensington. While yet an under-lieutenant he had, during a holiday excursion to Salzburg, met, courted, and married a young English lady, who was then a travelling companion to the Marchioness of B——; and this young person was the sister of Charlie Bennett's mother. Kirschenfeld's wife died, leaving him one child, a little girl whom he, a year or two thereafter, sent to England to be brought up and educated.

When the old major came to live in England, his daughter became his housekeeper, and had much ado to teach the soft-voiced English servants to address their master not as "Herr Mayaw," but "Herr Mayoarrr," a title he insisted upon receiving from everybody. The house-

hold regulations were solely under her direction; and no appeals were suffered. Even when the commander-in-chief had particular movements to order, he invariably transmitted them to this little dark-haired, dark-eyed general of his, who in turn delivered them to the chief of her household staff. One condition only limited her freedom of action: before two o'clock in the day only German could be spoken between her and her superior officer; thereafter English prevailed; but occasionally he, with a touch of Hohenzollern absolutism, defied his own law, and broke, despite the warning finger of the time-piece, into the joyous freedom of his native tongue.

When Charlie Bennett arrived that evening at his uncle's house, a very different scene from that which his own wretched lodgings offered was presented

to him. Dinner was over, and the major lay in a large easy chair, which was drawn near the fire, a long cigar-tube in his mouth, a brilliant smoking-cap on his head. Beside him, on the table, stood a dark brown flask of Steinberger, and as he poured out some of the pale golden wine into a glass, a fine emerald, which he wore on the fore-finger of the right hand, glittered and shone in the ruddy flame-light. Opposite him sat his daughter Marie, whose large, clear hazel eyes, dark, smoothly-brushed hair, and bright, intelligent face, caught likewise a tinge of that crimson glow. She was very unlike her father. Her white, well-shaped brow, beautifully proportioned head, the simplicity of her features, and, above all, the fearless serenity of her calm eyes, showed the presence of singular self-possession and of an unusual harmony of faculties;

while the quiet, pleasant smile with which she rose to welcome her cousin, testified no less to her transparent honesty than to her unobtrusive good nature. She had, indeed, one of those faces, happily not very uncommon in certain classes of English society, which provoke at once a warm and subtle sympathy, which has, at first, less of admiration than of a simple liking. Not even a fool could feel constrained in her presence; but then a fool would have gone out of it without recognizing the strength of character which lay underneath that placid and pleasant exterior. And not unnaturally, perhaps; for as yet she was but the mere plastic material of womanhood, of an exceptionally fine and pure quality, waiting to be worked upon and moulded by circumstances.

On Charlie's seating himself, the old major threw upon the table a newspaper

he had been reading. There was a bright, victorious light on his face.

"There," he said, with a laugh, "didn't I tell you, Marie, what would come of their Gastein Convention?* Lieber Gott in Himmel!—what fools they were to think that our noble Preussen gives up her good work in Germany for to add to the brood of little states that cackle like chicken for safety to their Austrian mother! Read that, Junge!"

He threw Charlie the paper, which was a copy of the *Nord-Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, containing, as well as Charlie could make out, some proclamation of the law officers of the Prussian Crown as

* I have deemed it unnecessary to use that printing of German pronunciation of English which is a cheap sort of sarcasm too often used by those whose own efforts in speaking a foreign language might make the angels weep.

to the alleged absurdity of the Augustenburg claims.

"You know now why I call upon you this evening?" said Charlie's uncle. "I come to offer you a chance of living—of becoming a man. Du schweigst?"

"I don't know what it means," said Charlie, uncomfortably poring over the dingy paper.

"You do not see what shall come of this? Do you not know what our Preussen has been wanting ever since the Allies put the Germanic Confederation in place of Napoleon's Rhine Confederation? You do not know why she wanted Alsen and Kiel? You do not understand why she got Austria to go into a Convention out of the Bund?"

"I never was good at conundrums, Herr Major," said Charlie, "and the Schleswig Holstein one beat me from the beginning."

"What has Schleswig Holstein to do with that? Austria has gone out of the Bund: now she goes to appeal to the Bund to help her against Preussen: the Bund says yes: we first go and sweep away that old verfluchter Bund, and second we go to fight the rose-water officers and court-favourite generals of Austria, with their troops of starving Slavs and Italians, and Czechs. What comes then? Das kann man sagen, das wird man sehen, ein neues, schönes, vereintes Deutschland!"

"You've been looking for it a long time, papa," said Marie.

"It has come at last. And what with it? A chance of the young men in this country to become alive. I say there is no life here—no stir—nothing but cotton and money; no wonder the young men think to waste their lives in making

poetry and painting in a country that does not move. If our Goethe had been a dozen years with the army, instead of getting only an amateur look at it, do you think he would begin to write plays that no one can read without laughing? If Goethe is a poet—Sacramente! and what a poet!—I don't think it strange the young men of a country like this should be most fools. Look at his Wilhelm Meister—der einfältige Zieraffe! —running away from his father's business, turning to be a bad actor in a booth, making himself the laughing-stock of a lot of women who amused themselves at his vanity, and airs, and long speeches—bah! if he was come beneath the hand of a sound and strong Prussian drill-sergeant for a year or two, he would lose his childish affectations. It was time the small states were to be crushed out

when they allowed a man to write such folly!"

He handed the long straight cigar-tube to Marie, who rose and fetched another Havana.

"If the war comes soon, Junge, you shall have the chance to go," said he to Charlie, "and not every one has that. I write to the Government, and they say yes; I get you your *Protektion;* you study hard and you become officer in the *Landwehr.* You go to the war—you have action, business, good work, until your eyes are bright and your cheeks are brown, and you think the ugliest Silesian girl an angel—then you know what life is and you feel yourself alive—and you look back and thank God you are no more in a small, dirty room, with dim eyes and feeble limbs, and no appetite, and headache. You will live in the open air, and

sleep beneath the big, clear sky, and you will have great joy when you see even brown bread and thick beer before you. That is life—that is to be alive!—Herr Gott, the people one meets here have never lived a moment! They might as well be born worms and crawl for ever beneath the ground!"

"Herr Major," said Marie, "you will let the cigar drop on the rug if you swing your arm so."

"Canarienvogel, will you go to see that coffee is prepared in the other room? I must talk private business with my young soldier."

She left, and the Major at once rose to his feet. He was evidently greatly excited: perhaps by the reminiscences which his picture of a soldier's life had recalled.

"Well, then," he said, as he walked up

and down the room, "what shall we say? You will go, or you will not?"

"I can't," said Charlie.

"You will not go after what I say? You will not go and make a man of you? You are no better than the silly women and men who stagnate themselves in Rome and spend their life in making feeble copies of things that were set up in honour of men who would have laughed at them, or whipped them, or sold them for slaves. There were armies then, Junge, in these old times, and they put up big pillars and monuments for them; and now-a-days a man has nothing better to do in life than copy the fragments of broken stone! Der liebe Himmel! what a calling! Then you are made up in your mind not to go?"

He watched his companion's face.

"I'm not fitted for it. I never had any

liking for such a thing. In short, Herr Major," said Charlie, "I'd rather not."

"Gott sei Dank!" said Kirschenfeld, with a strange expression, "for how could I stay away myself, and all my country up and fighting for what I hold as dear as they do? I ask you, Junge, how could I stay here, and see in the papers that they had begun their march with 'Heil dir im Siegerskranz,' with their helmets slung from their waist, their trousers buckled up, their eyes turned to the south, and the flame of German liberty in their heart? And if you went, how could I go and leave her alone? That is why I visit you this afternoon."

The old man continued his firm, stately tread up and down the room; a keen internal struggle clearly going on between that great longing unrest which prompted him in his old age to set out and lend a hand

in the good work and that paternal affection for his little general which had already prompted him to remain with her so many years in a country which he himself did not greatly like.

He sate down in his easy-chair and confronted Charlie with that unflinching light blue eye of his.

"You are poor," he said, "you will never be able to exist by that devil of a trade of painting. Do not speak till I have done. I say you are poor. Very well. I will make you rich. Look you at this. If the war breaks out and I go, Marie must remain at home. I cannot take her with me and leave her in the nearest town; for all Germany is then in flames. Sachsen will be the great battle-ground; but sooner or later all the states may be in war, and no town safe. God help me if I cannot stay here—I believe

no—no if I hear my Pomeranians and my Westphalians and my Rhine-Prussian brothers are crying 'Heil unserm König' with their eyes looking on Œsterreich. I must go—I must go: and *she*—she will be in London."

He twisted his great white moustache as though he would have wrenched it from the skin, in his effort to remain cool and businesslike.

"Look you, Karl, she is the bravest and best little girl in England, I will swear to you that; and she like you more than you think, little as she speak to me or any one else about it. Very well, I say to you 'There is a brave girl to make a wife: I will give her to you.' I know you; I have faith in you; I do not need to have to fear for her, and so I say, 'There, take my little canarienvogel and keep her.' My friends in Preussen they say to me, 'We

give up everything, our wives and children, our professions, our houses, all to go and fight these verdammte Austrians.' I say to them, 'I can only give up my little canary-bird, but who will put a value upon her?' Very well, it is not much. Very many people do that. Very many people will die—but that is nothing—that is what every man must risk, and have not the right to call himself a good man; but I say that when everybody boasts of what he has sacrificed for Preussen, I know in myself that my Marie is more than any one has sacrificed—dasz Gott erbarme!"

There seemed to be a great sob struggling up in that mighty breast of his; but he struck his hand angrily on the arm of the chair.

"May God forgive me for talking like a fool," he said, almost bitterly. "It is as men that you and I have got to talk to each other. Very well, you are too poor

to have a wife—what remains? I give you every inch of my land in Westphalia, and you have every year four thousand thaler—about six hundred pound. That is for yourself; what I give to my Marie is my affair afterward. You can live in London, if you like; you can live in the country, if you like; anywhere that you and Marie like, except France. I will not permit that you live in France; for neither the wives nor the husbands there are good for example."

The major, now calm, and keen-eyed, and practical, looked at the young man before him, who blushed up to the very tips of his ears. There was a painful silence for several seconds; and the old warrior, who had never been visited by the idea that his nephew would refuse his offer, began to appear a little astonished.

"Very well," he said, with a dry

smile; "perhaps I find out your secret by chance. Have you spoken to her, then?"

"To whom?" said Charlie, who was vainly trying to collect himself.

"To Marie, of course. Ah, you have seen, then, that it is good to have a wife who will be always the same to you, who will not shame you by her bad education or rough manner, who you may depend for to be always good, and modest, and cheerful as a bright little canary-bird in your house. Ach Gott! what it is to have such a wife!"

"But——"

"But? Lieber Himmel, away with 'buts'! Your pride is wounded because I offer you money? Be a man, and take the money; and if you have girlish pride, let it speak afterward! I do not buy you for my daughter—Gott bewahre!—but I will not see her shut up in an artist's

lodging, with her cheek getting pale for want of fresh air, and driving, and good food. If she cannot have all these when she marry, then so sure as I am alive she shall die—what you call them?—an old maid!"

"It isn't that," blurted out Charlie, with an awful effort; "it is that I can't marry her, because I'm going to marry some one else."

Kirschenfeld bounced up from his chair; and his great stature loomed over the young man as though it would crush him where he sate.

"You will neither go to the war and let me stay with Marie, nor will you marry her while I go?"

"How can I?" said Charlie, humbly; "I would be no use in a war; and as for marrying Marie, I don't suppose there's anybody in the world likes her better than

I do, and thinks more of her; but all the same——"

"All the same you are a fool," said the major. "How do you mean to keep a wife? Isn't starvation bad enough for one? Are you determined to be such an ass as to remain miserable every day of your life when you have the chance of to be comfortable? What is the name of the person you marry?"

"It is Miss Glencairn I hope to marry," said Charlie, contritely.

"Was, doch?" cried Kirschenfeld, again beginning his heavy march up and down the room, "that girl with the face like of an actress, who looks as if she was intended by the devil to flirt with a whole garrison. Why——"

"Herr Major," said Charlie, warmly and proudly, "all women don't wear their hearts on their faces; and I don't see——"

"Heart? Heart? Do you think, Eselskopf! that there ever was a heart behind that smirking face, and the sly eyes, and the pale rings of hair, and the affectation of innocence? Why, doesn't it show me you need to be wrested from that groove of yours—to be thrown about the world a bit—and meet women who will teach you how to open your eyes. Was für——"

"Herr Major!" said Charlie, starting to his feet, and crossing the floor with the gait of a man whom action alone prevents from giving way to his indignation, "an insult to her is more than an insult to me. Good evening."

At this moment Marie came running lightly upstairs, opened the door, and came into the room.

"What! are you going, Charlie?" she said, with surprise in her eyes.

"I am!" he said, sharply and angrily turning upon her, as though she had done him a cruel injury.

"Oh," she said, calmly, but with a sudden dignity of demeanour, "then I wish you a good evening."

Her tone was very cold and reserved; and yet her eyes were following him with just a touch of disappointment in them.

"Good evening," he said, without shaking hands with either of them; and in a second he was downstairs.

She turned to her father.

"What's the matter with Charlie, father?"

"The matter?" repeated the major, who had been grumbling guttural anathemas in his native tongue, "don't you see what's the matter? Don't you see that this pestilent English air has knocked all the common sense out of him, and that he will

not give up his miserable, sickly, morbid life for anything I can offer. Bah! Why do you keep me in England, little monster; in this country that should have been buried a hundred years ago?"

"Herr Major," she said, going and putting her arm round his neck, and laying her cheek on his bushy white whiskers, "I will go with you anywhere you like—to Leipsic, Dresden, Vienna, Munich, Berlin—anywhere."

"Leipsic, and be under the government of that old fool? Vienna, and live with one's face on the ground before that Spitzbube of a Kaiser? München, and be killed by their ghastly resurrection of dead Greece and their blinding walls and their dusty streets? Berlin?—well Marie, but there it is too cold for you."

"I don't think we are very unhappy just where we are," she suggested.

"You don't know," said he, moodily; "come and let us have coffee, and then you shall play me the march out of that sonata—you know the one I mean."

Meanwhile Charlie Bennett was making his way eastward and southward towards the home of his beloved. He was not conscious of having done anything meritorious in refusing six hundred a-year and a pretty wife; but he was conscious of a pain at his heart which this evening's interview had again stirred up. What if this judgment of Kirschenfeld's upon the appearance of Fanny were really the result of experience? What if his own disquietude about the constant visits of Helstone were not without some cause? Again and again he reproached himself for these unworthy thoughts, and strove to banish them from his mind: again and again they returned, until he was in a perfect torture of doubt

as he neared Fanny's home. Ten minutes' speech with her was now all the poor lad longed for; and he felt sure that that alone would set his heart at rest.

The gratification was, for that evening at least, denied him. He found the old botanist's household in dreadful commotion; for Mr. Glencairn himself had just been carried in from a cab, insensible, by Mr. Helstone and a stranger. It was not a time to press a lover's suit.

CHAPTER IV.

WHICH WAY?

IT was on the same evening that Fanny had promised to meet Christian Helstone; and dusk had just begun to fall over the dull neighbourhood of Kennington, when the slight little figure, wrapped up in a warm, grey-coloured woollen shawl, which seemed to nestle so cosily round the white neck and under the pretty rings of pale yellow hair, made its way down from Clapham to the corner of Kennington Church.

"I cannot stay with you long," she said, as she took his arm, and they

passed away into the darker shadows of Brixton Road. "Mamma is very angry. Papa has been away ever since morning. We suppose he must have gone into the country after those stupid plants of his; and this forenoon some one came out from Oxford Street. Surely I may confide in your silence so far as to say that there's something wrong with the business?"

She looked up into his face with those big, infantine eyes of hers.

"What are we to do?" she continued, petulantly; "he goes away now constantly. He does not attend to the business. All that mamma can say does not stir him; it only makes him sad. I really do wish he would become angry, for I can't bear to see him only moody, and silent, and unhappy; and then, you know, mamma *does* speak a little bitterly at times."

"And you? Do you not consider yourself in all this?" said Helstone; "you are as much a human being as your father and mother, and the instinct of self-preservation must teach you that you have your own interests to look after, and that it is your duty to look after them."

"Oh, don't, don't, don't!" she said, with a fervour which was not quite natural. "When I left you the other evening I didn't know what to do or say. My head was in a whirl. It isn't fair of you to torment me with all those reasons that seem to say everybody must look out for himself or herself, and care for nobody else. Before I got home I had almost come to regard my father and mother, and poor dear Charlie, as my enemies. You can't expect a girl to be logical, and able to reply to all those things; but I feel that they're wrong, and I won't have them—I won't!"

She tossed her head in such a pretty way that the point of her anger was lost in the delicious twirling of those light curls which hung about her ears.

"And I have come to-night simply to tell you—I'm very sorry, you know, but I can't help it—that after what you said the other evening I don't think it proper of me to see you any more. If you had been contented to remain my friend, I should have been glad; but you are not, and so——"

"What a brave little martyr you are! Have you forgotten all I said to you, then? Do you think it your duty to lead on this unhappy young fellow into a marriage which will ruin him for life, plunge you into misery, and add to the straightened circumstances of your parents? If you are fond of him, how can you think of such a thing? You like him very well,

doubtless. He has great goodnature, and an almost feminine amiability; and as yet he does not know what a jealous mistress art is. If you marry him, and consign yourself as well as him to the worst tortures of poverty—when you force him to relinquish his painting in order to accept some humiliating trade—do you think the light love of a young man will be stronger than his regret—that he will not reproach you for having destroyed his dearest prospects in life?"

She shuddered as she replied,

"There is but one alternative, and that he will feel far more deeply. If I break my promise, it will break his heart."

"Young men's hearts are not easily broken," said Helstone, quietly, "and a temporary sorrow to him will be better than the lasting regret of you both. If he has not the courage to break the en-

herself, "Why is it that I never can have friends? I should like Charlie to have remained my friend—and now——"

She became silent again, as they slowly continued their walk in the damp, foggy air.

"You, too," she said, "I should like to have had you for a friend—more, I think, than any one I ever met in my life; but that will not content you. Mamma says I am selfish; but I——"

"And why not a friend for life?" he said, with the first touch of real tenderness his voice had exhibited. "Do you not believe, Fanny, that I would lay my whole existence at your service, that I should be so proud of you and so fond of you that you would never have to fear my regretting the step we had taken?"

"Charlie says precisely the same," she said, with a coolness that cut him to the

quick—for indeed it is impossible to imagine a more mortifying position than that of a man who has just been told that his protestations of affection are but repetitions of what his rival has said before him.

"I must go home," she said; "perhaps papa has already returned in his usual condition of roughness and scratches from his ramble in the country. If you could only see him at the door—with his hands all coarse and brown, his shirt-collar gone, his hair brushed back with perspiration, and such a fine, glad look in his brown, dear face—and then to see the gladness go away as he sits down before mamma's cold eyes, and hears her cutting little speeches."

"But you will not go without telling me a little of what you mean to do, Fanny. You say you like me as a friend. Can I be your friend and not warn you against the crime you are going to commit—for a

woman cannot commit a greater crime than to marry a man whom she does not love with her whole heart. No, hear me out. There is no law in heaven or earth can compel a woman to keep a sacrilegious promise. If she was to swear on a thousand Bibles to marry a man, and thereafter find she did not love him as a husband ought to be loved, she would be a hideous criminal if she kept her oath. What nonsense is talked about oaths! People nowadays know more about Shakspere than about Christ, and are satisfied if their religion and their morality pass the crucial test of respectability. If there was a little less Judaism, and a little more Christianity, there would be no need for me to tell you that in keeping your word to this man Bennett, you will commit a gross sin, and do him a cruel injury."

"I will not hear any more!" she said, stamping her little foot on the pavement.

(Feeling that her notions of right and wrong were becoming terribly vague, she took refuge in anger).

"You have no right to speak to me in that way. It is not the business of a friend to speak in that way. When I say that I love the man I mean to marry, you should be ashamed to know that you have forced me to make a confession which——"

"*Which is not true.*"

She turned, half in fright, half in anger, towards him; but her eyes quailed before that clear, steady, penetrating glance of his.

"I thought at least I should be safe from insult," she said, in a low voice, "if I met you as you wished."

"Fanny," he said, imploringly, "forgive me if I have hurt you; but I must speak the truth. I do not blame you. Your conduct has been very natural.

You had an affection for him as you would have for any old friend, and you feel a scruple of conscience against breaking your promise to him. I can only say, God forbid you should lay the foundation of his and your own misery through a mistaken sense of honour."

He saw how much his words had affected her; and he was too sagacious to press his advantage.

"Let us go home," she said, almost inaudibly.

The fog had increased so that objects on the other side of the street were almost totally hidden. The shop-windows were glaring out with a murky yellow radiance into the dense white mist; and the people passed them like so many spectres gliding through the opaque vapour. Fanny and Helstone had now turned round from Brixton Road, and had reached the corner

of Clapham Road, when Helstone uttered a low, quick cry, which was partly a gasp and partly a shriek. Fanny, startled, and conscious at the same moment of a sharp pain caused by his fingers convulsively clutching her arm, darted a terrified glance to his face, and saw to her amazement that his features were blanched and his eyes staring like those of a madman. She looked in the direction whither his eyes were turned, and could but indistinctly see the figure of a tall woman approach: the next moment she found herself tightly grasped by the wrist and dragged from the pavement.

"Come—come!" said Helstone, "for God's sake, come!"

Blindly dragging her through the fog, he, in his paroxysm of terror, neither looked to the presence of a man who was crossing the street in front of him, nor

listened to the rattle of a cab which was bearing down upon the place. He struck against this man, threw him in front of the advancing horse, and the next second there was a sharp note of warning from the cabman, a striking and stumbling of hoofs, and the man lay between the horse's feet. Fanny had instinctively clasped her hands over her eyes; and when she took them down again, Helstone had led her to the opposite pavement where the man lay.

And that long spare form so thinly clad—that throat destitute of muffler or other token of a wife's tenderness—that thin grey face and grey hair?—with a cry that rang down the street, she threw herself on her knees beside her father, and tried to raise him in her arms.

"Let be, let be, my lassie," said a big Scotchman, who had stopped to carry the

old man to the side of the road, "we'll lift him into the cab, and ye'll tell us where to tak him hame. It's a bad job; but when the Lord sends a nicht like this, a body maun e'en lippen himself tae chance in crossin' a street. Hae ye a bit hankerchief noo, that we may save the gentleman's guid claithes frae bein' spiled by the bluid?"

Scarcely knowing what she did, she drew the handkerchief from her pocket. She had lost sight of Helstone. When she next saw him, he was standing by the door of the cab, in a dazed manner, holding the handle until Mr. Glencairn could be carried in. Then he turned to her, and seemed to be struggling to speak with his white lips.

"Come in, lassie," said the Scotchman, "and tell us where tae gang. Out the road, ye fule, and let the lassie get in."

He pushed Helstone back from the door, and Fanny entered the vehicle.

"I'll—I'll go for a doctor, Fanny," said Helstone, as they drove off; and he was left in the middle of the street, apparently powerless to act or think.

The two men who had propped up Mr. Glencairn in the cab, carried him into the house, and laid him in the bed upstairs; while Fanny, with a bravery for which few would have given her credit, endeavoured to mitigate the frantic hysterics of her mother. In a very few moments the doctor arrived, accompanied by Christian Helstone, who now, despite his pallor, endeavoured to assume all his coolness and self-command. Obeying the doctor's suggestion, he insisted on Mrs. Glencairn going into another room, Fanny being left to take her place.

CHAPTER V.

THE KISS.

IT is three weeks after the accident. The house is hushed and still; Mrs. Glencairn moves noiselessly about, with hopeless melancholy on her face; Fanny is quiet, self-possessed, capable of amusing herself, like a kitten, by toying with any bit of thread or thimble within her reach.

For a time Mrs. Glencairn displayed towards her stricken husband traits of a kindness to which he had long been a stranger; but as time accustomed her to the inevitable, she grew to think less of

his ailment, and more of the possible results it might have on their now precarious fortunes.

During this interval, Mr. Helstone had sent frequently and called several times to inquire how it fared with the old man upon whom he, inadvertently, had brought this mishap; but never once had he given Fanny an opportunity of questioning him as to the cause of the strange excitement which had been the means of throwing her father among the horse's feet. Helstone not only was silent upon the point, but avoided any reminiscence which might call for a history of that night's events; and indeed Mrs. Glencairn and Fanny were unwilling to wound the feelings of their best friend by recalling the fact of his having been the unlucky instrument of Providence in the matter.

One evening, however, about this time,

he himself referred to the affair; for he was not unconscious of a marked estrangement which had ever since that unhappy evening grown up between Fanny and himself. She seemed to regard him with distrust, almost with fear; and he knew that so long as this sentiment existed, it was impossible for him to continue his particular kind of courtship—which may be described as an endeavour to win the affections of the understanding—with any chance of success.

"It has come at last," said Mrs. Glencairn, bitterly, as she partly communed with herself, and partly addressed Fanny, "and I am not surprised. I knew what we had to expect from a man whose whole life turns towards idleness in the country as the only thing in the world worth thinking about. It has always seemed to me that he was possessed by

a demon, like some of those we read of in Scripture, that drives him into the wilderness when he should be providing for his wife and children. And now we have reached the end."

"The end of what, mamma?" said Fanny, as she amused herself by poking a knitting-needle through the table-cover; "what is it that is going to happen?"

"Ruin."

The proud-hearted woman turned away to conceal her emotion, and sat down in front of the old dingy piano, which she opened. Then, with a little toss of the head, as if to throw off the weight of care, she began to play, very softly and quietly, an old Irish air. Fanny came and put her arms round her mother's neck, thereby stopping the thin music which the old, quivering wires had been giving forth.

"You mustn't play just now, mammy."

"What is to be done?" continued her mother; "your father cannot be expected to be out of his room for weeks, and already matters have come to a crisis. Mr. Morrison was up yesterday to see if I could not lend him money to pay the salaries on Saturday. Lend him money! After I had foolishly expressed my admiration for that parasol we saw the other morning, I was obliged to confess to Mr. Helstone that my only reason for not buying it was the want of as much money."

Fanny took her mother's head between her plump little white hands and gently turned it round.

"If my sad mamma would only look over there upon the sofa, she would see something waiting for her."

Mrs. Glencairn rose, with a hot flush on her cheek.

"Who sent that parasol here?"

"Mr. Helstone," said Fanny.

"I will not accept it!" said Mrs. Glencairn, warmly. "You will return it to him. We are not quite beggars yet, and when we do become beggars, it is not from Mr. Helstone that we shall receive alms."

With the gait of a tragedy-queen, Mrs. Glencairn swept out of the room; and Fanny, sitting down, consoled herself with a hearty cry. For it had been through a hint of hers that Helstone had purchased the parasol. It was, indeed, a little conspiracy of theirs to surprise and please this imperious mamma.

Her eyes were still wet when Mr. Helstone was announced and entered.

"Why, Fanny, you've been crying."

She straitened herself up with as much of her mother's cold reserve as her shorter stature and softer outlines would permit; and thus she received him.

"You seem displeased with me," he said; "let me ask you now, when we are alone, why you have been so distant and strange during the past week. Are you vexed at anything, or are you frightened by what occurred on the last night we were out together?"

She made no answer.

"Perhaps you have cause to be," he continued, "but indeed how can I explain to you the absurdity of which I was guilty? You think I was frightened by the appearance of some one; and you are naturally enough suspicious of me. But I was not. My agitation arose from a very simple cause; and if it hadn't been for fear of your laughing at me, I should have told

you ere this what affected me so. Can you guess?"

"No," she said, but it was evident she was listening with great interest.

"I saw a ghost!" he said, with a forced laugh; "actually, I fancied I saw a ghost; and before I could recall my common sense, an impulse of involuntary fear drove me to cross the road."

He seemed to wait anxiously for a reassuring smile; but on her infantine face, and big blue eyes, there was only a vague, solemn wonder.

"You are not surprised!" he said; "don't you think it strange one's nerves should so get out of order as to project into space, and render visible, a creation of the mind? Don't you think it rather comical, Fanny, that all of us may have the power to call the spirit of a dead friend from an undigested mass of cucumber?"

There was little comedy in his tone; and there was clearly no appreciation of it written upon her eyes. Her seriousness annoyed him.

"You look as if you believed in ghosts!" said he.

"What was it like?" she asked.

"Oh, of course it took the shape of some one I once knew, now dead; and the fun of it was that all her clothes and jewels were gifted with resurrectionary power also."

"Was it a woman?"

"Yes."

"Tall and dark?"

He drew back several inches from her, and fixed his eyes, with a strange look in them, upon her.

"Did you see such a figure?" he gasped, and his face was whiter than she had seen it even on that night.

"I did, for she looked at you."

For an instant he seemed to lose all consciousness of her presence and of his own position, so fierce was the mental struggle taking place in his brain. Then he burst into a loud laugh.

"This is indeed a marvel in psychology! But no—it isn't possible that we two, at the same moment, could project the same idea, and impress it on our senses. Doubtless that tall figure we saw, which had, I confess, so startling a resemblance to a friend of my mother's, dead half a dozen years ago, was some worthy housekeeper in Brixton, returning home with her purchases of tea and sugar. What fools our imagination makes of us! You didn't see anything particularly ghostly about that elderly person, did you?"

"No," said Fanny, who seemed greatly relieved by the explanation.

"Of course, not," said Helstone, quietly and calmly, "and yet I have seen not only this one ghost lately, but several supernatural phenomena, all of which teach me a good lesson. If I don't take upon myself some actual practical work which will interest me without fatiguing my brain, I shall have an attack of *delirium tremens* produced by too much subjective study. And indeed I must cure myself of a habit of seeing ghosts, or how can I ever again ask you to go out with me for a little walk? Not to speak, Fanny, of——"

But his further guesses at futurity were interrupted by the tinkling of a little bell, which called Fanny into her father's room.

"You may come also," she said, as she opened the door leading into Mr. Glencairn's study; "papa will be glad to see you, I know; for he must feel very dull in that little room."

So Helstone entered with her; and the old man gave him a faint smile of welcome.

"I wanted Fanny to hand me down some of my dried plants," he said, in a weak voice; "perhaps you will find them more easily than she would, if you will take the trouble. You will see the *Papaveraceæ* on the fourth shelf from the top, on the left-hand side; and you might give me the *Salicaceæ* too—they're down near the foot—for I want to see if the insects have been at them again."

Helstone brought the two packages of large sheets, and placed them on the coverlet before the old man, who was propped up in the bed with pillows. While Fanny took a small watering-can to freshen up the ferns in the large case at the window, Helstone sat down by the bedside to help Mr. Glencairn in his

examination of the plants. As he did so, he could not fail to remark how the sunken, sallow face was lit up with a keen joy as the long, bony, brown fingers turned over the leaves.

"These poppies are hard to lay down," said Glencairn, garrulous over his pets, "if you want to preserve their beauty. Have you seen the *Papaver hybridum*?—you see, I have a good specimen, but the petals are wanting. This *Meconopsis* was sent me by Professor H—— the very morning after Fanny was born, and I don't know which of nature's productions pleased me most. Don't they look very much alike, these willows? But if you want to blind yourself over a microscope, and give yourself a headache with thinking, just you begin to prove that they are. When I had got my pamphlet on the genus *Rubus* prepared for the

press, I had nearly worked myself into a fever."

How bright his eyes were as he slowly murmured on, telling little anecdotes, and recalling reminiscences of bygone days and scenes and friends! Even to the narrow imagination of Helstone, this strange world gradually unfolded itself, until the very room began to smell of sweet brier, and he fancied he heard the long, low plashing of the sea.

"You cannot tell how I have grown to love that herbarium," said the old man, with a glance at his favourite cabinet; "it is as great a storehouse as memory itself, and helps me often when memory fails. I can produce a transformation-scene with one of these sheets: habit, you see, sir, habit. Somehow I never look on the *Lychnis alpina* but I see the top of little Kilrannoch before me; a scrap of parsley-

fern calls up a breezy day I spent on Ben Nevis with Professor H——and Mr. D——, until I almost feel myself wet with the thick fog of the clouds; and if I want to get into the awful solitude of Glen Sannox—you were never there?—a whiff of the scent of the sweet-gale is enough."

He was silent for a while, and the sheets dropped from his hand. Was he recalling other memories — memories of summer evenings, by the side of streams, of one beautiful, tender face looking up to him with a puzzled smile to hear the long Latin names—of sweet eyes that had silently sworn faithfulness in the solemn twilights of the past? For there were these memories, also, connected and interwoven with this pursuit of his; insomuch that his grand, supercilious wife had once or twice caught this dreamy husband of hers bending over some little scrap of

withered weed with something in his eye that he turned away to hide. Helstone could not make it out. It was unfathomable, unreasonable. He put it all down as a monomania—one of those convenient terms which, like "electrical currents" "animal magnetism," "somnambulism," and so forth, serve as the Sunday-coat of human ignorance.

Mrs. Glencairn here entered the room, evidently vexed and irritated to an unusual degree.

"Ah, how do you do, Mr. Helstone?" she said; "this is a poor little place to receive you, but my husband *would* have his bed brought in amongst all this lumber. And perhaps it is better we should accustom ourselves to small rooms and inconvenience."

"Why, Mrs. Glencairn?" inquired Helstone, expecting a theory.

"Bécause," said she, in her cold, unimpassioned voice—was it possible this woman could ever have murmured "*I love you*" in her lover's ear?—"because, unless we obtain some one to look after the business, we must remove to a smaller house."

The old melancholy had settled down on James Glencairn's face; there was no more hidden happiness in the grey, sad eyes.

"There is no use in attempting to conceal from ourselves the truth," continued Mrs. Glencairn, without looking at her husband. "From what Mr. Morrison says, the business can only exist if an energetic manager is at once placed at its head, and the business cannot afford to pay for such a manager. What remains?"

"God's providence," said her husband; and the woman started.

"What is one house to us, or another house to us, when we are in the great house which He overshadows with His love? What matters our little movings-about, our tossings up and down on these ripples, if we are gathered into the great haven at last? I dare say, wherever we go, we shall find God's stars still above our head, and not far from our feet as much ground as will make us a grave."

She answered with ever so slight a shrug of the shoulders.

"Mr. Helstone, do you know anything of business?" said Fanny, with her eyes on the ground.

"Certainly I do," said Helstone, quickly, as if struck with a new idea, "and if you think, Mr. Glencairn, that I could be of any service to you, I hope you will do me the great favour of accepting it. Now I know book-keeping, for instance; I know

more than I have had any reason to relish about bills; I know something of general trading business; and I know that when the cat's away the mice will play. If you think my presence in your place would do any good—if it was only to take counsel with your head clerk—believe me that I will gladly go there every day until you are well enough to go yourself. I have actually nothing to do until five or six in the afternoon; and I fancy I might really be of some use to you."

Here was a proposal!—and not one of these people saw that it had been originated by the alert brain of that young girl who was sitting there, with her pretty face, and her pretty curls, and her pretty eyes, apparently lost in graceful astonishment.

"But, Mr. Helstone," said Mrs. Glencairn, with a goodnatured smile, "the idea of your going into a shop at all is

so absurd;—what will your friends say when they see you?"

"My friends," said Helstone, with admirable suavity, "will be delighted to find a point for their not very searching sarcasm, and I shall rejoice in their joy. That is not the question. The matter to be proved is whether I can be serviceable or not, if Mr. Glencairn likes to make the trial. Will you, then, try me?"

The proposal was accepted, and it was arranged that Mr. Helstone should meet Mr. Morrison on the following forenoon. Fanny saw with her beautiful, innocent eyes (which saw as much as the eyes of all the people there put together), that her mamma was pleased with this offer; that she was very gracious to Mr. Helstone; and that even her father tried to be a little more complaisant to him. And she knew—what none of them even thought

of—that it was her proposal, her scheme, her success.

Shortly thereafter Helstone had to leave; and Fanny was sent to open the door for him, the servant being out of the way. As they left she took care to shut the study-door and the parlour-door; then they found themselves alone in the hall.

"Now I *love* you for what you've done!" she said, impulsively, with her bright eyes looking up into his face.

He seemed taken aback.

"You love me?" he repeated, attempting to take her hand.

"Now, why must I think of every word before I say it to you?" she whimpered. "I meant that I liked you—or should I say that I *admired* you for your kindness?"

"You provoking girl! You would tease the life out and break the heart of a saint."

"I suppose I was made to do that," she said, demurely. "Good-night."

She held out her hand to him, and the mere touch of his fingers seemed to recall a little tenderness to her face.

"I really wanted to say how very kind it was of you, if you would only let me speak; and, indeed, I never had a friend who would do as much. And I'm very, very, very grateful to you, Mr. Helstone—well, then, Christian, if you like it—and if I only knew any way of showing how very much I appreciate your goodness——"

Moved by an inscrutable fate, he bent his head down to her, and, in the impulse of the moment, without knowledge of what she did, she kissed him with a kiss as light as the touch of a feather. Then she shrank back, almost shuddering, from him, and covered her face with her hands.

"Fanny!—my. darling!" he said, with an eager tenderness which was really unaffected, "I know now you love me. Tell me that at least I——"

"Oh no, no, no!" she said, almost piteously; "you are wrong—indeed you are wrong! Forgive me for what I did—I never can forgive myself. Now, go away; and indeed, indeed it will be better—far better for both us, as I told you long ago, if we never see each other again. God bless you, and goodbye!"

She turned from him before he could detain her, and left him there, in the hall, alone, a prey to a strange mingling of unexpected joy and vague anxiety.

For a moment he remained undecided; then he opened the door, passed outside, and confronted a man whose hand was about to ring the bell. That man was

Charlie Bennett, who also had come to lay the disposal of the destiny of his life at Fanny's feet.

CHAPTER VI.

SUNLIGHT AGAIN.

THE shadowy doubts and surmises which were at this time oppressing poor Charlie had now reached their climax; and it is not too much to say that he had once and for ever fallen from his first estate of unconscious happiness.

Love to the lover is an infinite and eternal thing; it encompasses his being; it fills his whole future. All around him is love; all before him is love; the grave itself can put no period to the life of this secret, glad sensation. When he does realise to himself that love is a temporary

accident of human life, that its death is a possible thing, the revelation is like the shattering of the world to him. It is probably the first real conviction he receives of the existence of evil in the universe.

His faith in the constancy of his mistress may return, but the fatal knowledge that love may at any time grow faint and disappear, has deprived him of his old and settled peace, and only leaves him a temporary and intermittent joy. I speak of those who are truly capable of loving—a small proportion of mankind.

Filled with dread of this visionary horror, oscillating between the great self-abandonment of love and the narrow shrinkings of suspicion, Charlie upon this evening arrived at the house of his well-beloved, determined to renew his faith or prove his doubts.

Fanny, overwhelmed with remorse for her conduct towards Helstone, was resolved to atone for it, and win back her self-approbation by an unwonted display of gentleness and tenderness to Charlie. As the hour had almost arrived at which she expected him, she ran quickly upstairs, put on the faded old scarlet velvet jacket which she knew he liked, and sat down at the piano. There he found her.

She went to him with eyes full of kindness and meek affection; he had never been received so warmly, so modestly, so very sweetly. She was determined to make amends for her sin by complete devotion and subjection: she would save herself from further guilt by giving herself wholly up to him who had the best right to her heart. Ah! why will fortune make such fools of us!—she found him who, at

this moment, should have been willing to accept with the royal unconcern of manhood this sweet feminine homage, himself willing to go down upon his knees and beseech her for a little reassuring kindness!

"And you have just finished your work, Charlie?" she said. "You have been slaving away all day in that dingy place for a poor wee girl who can give you nothing in return but——what?"

"Herself!" he said, with the red blood rushing all over his fine, handsome face.

She only turned to the piano, and allowed her fingers to touch the keys here and there.

"I think you deserve some music," she said, demurely, "and yet I don't know if papa is still awake."

Charlie, not without some embarrass-

ment, remembered that he had forgot to ask how Mr. Glencairn was—a duty which he now fulfilled.

"He will be in bed for many weeks yet, and had it not been for an offer of Mr. Helstone's, I fear we should have been badly off. Of course," she added, hastily, seeing that the mere mention of Helstone's name had thrown a shadow upon Charlie's face, "the service he is going to render us is only that of looking a little over the accounts, and so forth, every day; and even that we should not have accepted had he not told us how anxious he was to have some sort of work to interest him apart from his profession."

"If you had asked me," suggested Charlie, humbly, "I should——"

"Now what do you know of accounts, my poor dear?" she said, with a smile such as would have turned the brain of an

Othello. "Are you so fond of me that you won't allow Mr. Helstone even to look at Mr. Morrison's books, or tie up a parcel of locks and keys?"

She laid her little white hand on his.

"Why will you not have faith in me, Charlie? Why will you vex yourself with this constant jealousy? Do you think I cannot see how unselfish and kind you are, or that I undervalue your love for me? When I do, the punishment will fall on myself."

"Then why do you always speak so sadly, in talking of the future?" said Charlie, who was still in the agonies of a vague unrest, "why should you always look forward to some misfortune?"

"I don't know," she said, in a low voice; and her eyes had an absent, wistful look in them which only disturbed him the more.

"We can make our own future, Fanny," he said, earnestly, almost piteously.

"If we only could!" she said with a smile; "if we only could shape out everything to suit ourselves in the world; and choose the people we most like; and never be deceived; and never be forced to part from them!"

Now why did this little speech pain Charlie? By what conceivable process of lover's logic did he construe it into a declaration of regret over her engagement with him?

"I cannot understand you, Fanny!" he said, almost angrily; "you appear to be dissatisfied with the only future to which I have hitherto looked as the greatest solace of my life; you never speak of it but you grow sad. You are always anticipating evil. For my part, I would rather face all the evil of the world

with you, than have all possible happiness without you. And, besides, I don't see why we should be a couple of children, expecting to be always comfortable, and frightened by any little trouble. Everybody has trouble of some sort."

"How very true!" she said, with a mock solemnity. "And therefore I'm to be blamed for having a little more common sense than you, Charlie, and calculating how many pictures we must sell in the year to keep ourselves alive. If it were I," she continued, slily, "who had to paint the pictures, I should feel satisfied; but how do I know you will not become lazy?"

This tone of settled anticipation delighted him.

"Do you know, Fanny," he said, eagerly, "I have got a commission for four pictures. I was down at Burridge's yesterday, and he told me a young lady

had called in and bought a little landscape of mine that was in his window. Then she asked if he had any more of mine. He had only one, and she bought that also; and then told him to get four similar subjects by the same artist."

"Why, she must be a princess in disguise!" cried Fanny, with a fine dramatic clasping of her hands, "and some day she will come to your studio and leave you a bag of diamonds. But no! I can't have her come to your studio. Now when I think of it, I begin to hate her. If it wasn't that she was bringing our marriage all the nearer, I should order you not to paint the pictures at all; for I consider it very improper for a lady to show such a marked preference for a young artist."

"I wish, all the same, she'd buy the pictures from me instead of Burridge."

She had involuntarily relapsed into her

old habit of wicked foolery, probably by reason of the too great tenderness and anxiety which he had shown upon meeting her. But now she recalled herself to her duty; and with a docile softness and kindness in her eyes (though her speech still retained some of its unnatural tone) she turned to him, and said,

"And so fortune is beginning to visit you, Charlie, after all? And the future won't be so bad for us both? You will be able to keep us from being subjected to the cutting speeches of mamma; for you know, dear, how she detests poor people. And, after all, things are going to be better? Oh, then, my darling, work hard! —be quick, quick, quick, *for I am wearying so to be married!*"

The utter self-abandonment of this confession struck poor Charlie as with an almost blinding happiness. After these

months of torturing suspense, lo! the white, warm sunshine of heaven was at last beaming upon him from those dear blue eyes! As in a dream, he wandered back to the first happy days of their courtship — to the first hesitating looks and pressures which dared to reveal the awful secret; and as the picture of that happy time and of her fond girlishness and beauty came before him, and as he saw himself now looking forward to the accomplishment of the vague dream of that bygone and gracious period, what should hinder the fool's eyes from becoming suffused with tears?

Alas! she saw it.

Shaking back the short light curls upon the soft white collar (one could have fancied that it purred to be in such a place) and on the scarlet velvet beneath, she struck the keys lightly and began to

sing — oh, so quaintly and slily!— the ballad of "Barney O'Hea," while Charlie, entranced as with the eating of opium, began to think the poor, ragged, Irish Barney one of the most beautiful and delightful heroes of fiction.

To dispel the dream, Mrs. Glencairn swept grandly into the room, and saluted the young man with a marked coldness.

"Fanny," she said, "you must not play any more; your father is going to sleep. He is tired; for although he cannot look at his business affairs, he can tire himself turning over those worthless weeds of his."

She sat down on the sofa, and took her work on her knee; but the bitterness of her soul had not yet gone out of her.

"I suppose, though, they're not worthless weeds when they are accounted of

more value than his wife and child—when he has ruined his family and himself for them."

Fanny came over to her, and tried to coax her into silence.

"Go and shut the piano, my child," she said, coldly. "Thank heaven, we may not have to sell it; * and if we are allowed to keep it, we shall have to thank the unselfishness and generosity of Mr. Helstone."

Somehow Charlie fancied that the hated name was specially hurled at himself.

* It would not have fetched five pounds.

CHAPTER VII.

THE INTERCEPTED LETTER.

FOR some time after the arrangement with Mr. Helstone was made, there reigned in the little household that unnatural calm which sailors fear as portending a hurricane.

Whether Mr. Helstone's assistance did much good to that hopeless business, I cannot say; but, at last, temporary difficulties were tided over. Then Charlie, bracing himself for a magnificent effort in view of his approaching marriage, seldom came over to Clapham; but worked assiduously at those not very striking land-

scapes for which he had at length found a secret purchaser. And Mr. Helstone naturally was over at Mr. Glencairn's house nearly every afternoon; and as he betrayed a little liking for Fanny, Mrs. Glencairn thought the least she could do to recompense him for his disinterested trouble was to encourage the pretty flirtation.

Fanny knew better than her mother whither all this was tending; and, to do her justice, she struggled against what seemed the inevitable course of events with an energy which was, at least in her own eyes, consistent and proper. But then, Mr. Helstone was so very kind, and so very clever; he had with him the air of a man who mixed in good society; he knew so well when to go away and when to come; he was funny always at the right moment; he was independent of profes-

sional ties, boasting a little private property, which taught him to regard his literary labour as an amusement; he was never preoccupied with his own affairs, like Charlie; he laughed away scruples and objections in such a delightful manner; —altogether Fanny thought no one had the right to deny her this pleasant, lively, agreeable companionship, and that as she was soon to be married to Charlie Bennett she would have plenty of time to "make it up to him."

And the heart of the girl, which was always warring with her head, said, "Yes, I will marry him, for does he not deserve it?"

Two or three weeks passed: Fanny and Helstone were constantly together. At the end of that time she was a very different woman from what she had been twelve months before. She was now wise.

Mr. Helstone, cautiously at first, but more broadly afterwards, had taught her certain philosophical theories which, as he admitted, were not generally placed before women. Fanny began to pity her mother's poor notions of conventional morality; she wondered that her father should have a bigoted dislike to any form of religion; and she was quite sure that the existing law of marriage was not only unauthorised by the Bible, but was a great social blunder.

It is not often that lovers' conversations lead to such results; but Helstone was an ingenious teacher, and Fanny was an apt scholar. Sometimes she felt very uncomfortable; and once she told him so.

"I don't believe you believe anything," she said; "and though I can't argue with you, I feel that what you say leads on to disbelieving everything. You would let everybody do what they liked, and be as

wicked as they liked, and you wouldn't meddle with them, and as for marriage——"

"Oh, no," he said, lightly, "there are always considerations of expediency that interfere, when society is not advanced enough to be logical."

So Fanny kept these "considerations of expediency" in her head, and mentally refuted the objections of her father and mother by this talisman. She had the good sense, however, not to exhibit to either of them any signs of her newly-acquired wisdom.

In time Mrs. Glencairn saw—or rather had to acknowledge she saw—that Mr. Helstone's particular attentions to Fanny meant marriage. She was not at all chagrined. In Charlie Bennett she recognised only another of those unworldly maniacs whose oblique vision, like that of her husband, so avoided the practical as to keep the kitchen larder empty; and she would

have no such person marry her daughter. Matters, therefore, went on pleasantly enough. Fanny put off from day to day that effort at renunciation by which she was to atone to Charlie. Helstone became more and more an intimate friend. Mrs. Glencairn connived at the long walks of the young people; and made no objection to Mr. Helstone's opportune little presents. The course of philosophical love ran smooth.

Mr. Glencairn was practically shut out of the question; he knew nothing of what was going on outside that little room of his; and when Mr. Helstone called in to see him about business matters, the relief of the visit was pleasant. Once only had Mr. Helstone drawn upon himself the wrath of the old man. Somehow their talk had run into Church affairs, and Helstone remarked coolly,

"I think the Roman Catholic religion finer than the Protestant, because it makes greater demands upon one's faith. If you can believe Catholicism, you have more faith, and therefore more religion, than you need have to be a Protestant."

Mr. Glencairn turned his wan face and deep-set grey eyes upon him, and rebuked him severely for talking of faith as if it were a haunch of venison; and thereafter seemed to regard Mr. Helstone, even in his most pious moods, with a strange suspicion. Once, indeed, Mr. Helstone inadvertently remarked to Mrs. Glencairn that "man had revenged himself upon the laws of the universe by inventing a belief in miracles;" but she thought it was a joke, and laughed.

The thunderstorm came. Mr. Helstone, in his moments of leisure, was accustomed to write long letters to Fanny, which he handed to her for her private instruction.

Ordinarily she burned these documents after reading them; but upon one occasion an unusually long and comprehensive one fell into her mother's hands.

That letter was a terrible awakening to the proud woman who had hoped through a rich son-in-law to gain some of that station and comfort which had hitherto been denied her. She had wished to indulge a little pardonable curiosity in looking over these expressions of the modern method of love-making; but presently she was reading with a rapid and angry glance, and her face was hot and cold by turns with vexation, disappointment, and wrath. I give this letter—with some trivial passages struck out; but the impatient reader who longs for incident may with propriety skip it:—

"*Thursday Morning.*

"My Darling,—You know how little I like to wallow in the moral pigsty of sleep; and here I am, at seven o'clock, without letters or newspapers or breakfast to pass the time. I will give myself up to you; and tell you how that delicious little note you gave me yesterday affected me. It seemed to me as if I had anticipated death, and floated out, as the old Brahmins expected to do, into an atmosphere of delight in which all personal consciousness was drowned. Did you ever recognise the meaning of the words, 'I am not myself at all, Molly dear'—in which the man, in his great love for something beyond himself, forgets the trammels in which the Spirit of Time has bound him, and would fain restore that primeval and impersonal mingling of

spirit which was once and which shall be our only existence?"

"They didn't write love-letters in that way when I was young," said Mrs. Glencairn, with a smile.

"But I'm afraid I shall tire you," continued Helstone's letter. "Metaphysics comes natural to a man who hasn't got his breakfast. What, then, of the future of which you speak? I agree with everything you say about your mother; but I hold it to be our duty to think a little of ourselves. The past generation had its day; let us have ours. The world can't be kept back because our grandmothers are alive. I see you won't listen to my theories of utilitarianism; and indeed I cannot expect you — any more than I'd expect a woman with high cheek-bones to be able to play one of Beethoven's sonatas. But if you won't look after your

own comfort, I will; and I don't choose to reap the prospective benefits of Heaven by enduring on earth the martyrdom of a mother-in-law."

It was at this point that Mrs. Glencairn's colour began to come and go.

"The fact is, man constructed Heaven to console himself for the hardships of earth; only he projected into the next world as much human tyranny as he ever found in this. I have said as much to you before; but now, my pet, I must remind you that we have the ordering of this world ourselves; and the person who takes into his or her house a mother-in-law flies in the face of Providence. The noblest epitaph you could write on a woman's grave would be '*Even her mother-in-law loved her;*' but where did you ever hear of its being done? No, Fanny; we will be as dutiful as we can; but we must not have our small

paradise invaded by any serpent, even in the guise of an angel. You know how much I admire your mother. I do; but then I love you. You may say, 'Il me plaît d'être battue;' but as your future husband I won't allow it, and Madame your good mother must content herself with ruling one household."

She read no more. She threw down the letter on the table, as though her loathing and contempt for the writer could not be more forcibly testified. But the impetuosity of her temper demanded more definite utterance. To whom should she apply? Her husband was never thought of. Charlie Bennett—yes, she would take this monstrous letter to the young man whose affections had been so wantonly outraged, and should demand his aid in revenging herself.

Five minutes thereafter she was in Clap-

ham Road; ten minutes thereafter she was on her way northward by way of Westminster Bridge. Now travelling in an omnibus is provocative of anger; and the bitter resentment of Mrs. Glencairn was greatly increased by the time she had changed omnibuses and was proceeding up Tottenham Court Road. Forgetting her own connivance, she began to consider Helstone's theft of Fanny's affections an unbearable outrage, and was scarcely less indignant with her daughter for having so shamefully treated this honest young man, who had faithfully and patiently been looking forward to his marriage with her.

"And she has taken up with what?—an atheist, a man without a grain of natural affection, a petty scribbler whose chief merit is his unbounded assurance."

Charlie was astounded to see Fanny's

mother. It was the second visit she had paid to his dingy little studio, in an acquaintanceship of some years' duration.

"Ah, my poor boy," she said, as she sank into a chair, "you wonder to see me —doubtless."

"There's nothing—wrong?" he asked, with a frightened look.

"That you must judge for yourself," she said—and she had no more consideration for the pain she would inevitably give him than if he had been one of his own canvases. "We have both of us been grossly deceived by those we had the best right to trust. I'm sure——"

"Is it Fanny?" he said, faintly; his thoughts of course flying now, as always, to her.

She had by this time taken the letter from her pocket; and, regarding only her own sorrows, gave it to him. He knew

Helstone's handwriting; and standing there, with the light falling from the top half of the window upon the page, he read the fatal message from beginning to end. There was no emotion visible upon his face or in his slightly frightened eyes; but he sat down in a chair, and looked again at the letter, which trembled in his fingers, with an apparent effort to find out something more in it.

"And she—what does she say?" he asked—and Mrs. Glencairn looked up in alarm upon hearing the strange alteration in his voice.

It began to dawn upon her that this letter might be, to him, a much more terrible thing than she had anticipated, and for a moment she repented her of her rashness. But the old exasperation returned, and she could not lessen her desire of revenge by concealing matters from the

young man who sat before her, silent, absent, with a great fear and dread in his eyes.

"She? Do you mean Fanny?"

He made no answer. He only looked at her, as if entreating an instant answer. Mrs. Glencairn shook her head mournfully.

"I could not have believed it of her. And how she managed to blind my eyes; —but I see it all now. Ah, I know what you must suffer—I know what it is to be deceived—for I myself——"

"Tell me, Mrs. Glencairn," he said, passionately, as he rose to his feet, "is it true? Has she told him she loved him? Are they to be married? For God's sake, tell me at once!"

"Is not that letter sufficient?" said Mrs. Glencairn. "I have not asked her. I was so astonished and shocked by dis-

covering this secret that I determined to see you before she returned. What am I to do? What must I say to her?—to him? I tell you they have deceived me; and I *will not* allow this marriage to take place—I say *I will not allow it.*"

But it was no thought of the marriage that possessed poor Charlie's mind. He did not begrudge Helstone the winning of this too lovely creature; it was the horrible thought that she—hitherto all light, and purity, and innocence—had so grievously fallen and sinned. In betraying him, she had suddenly assumed another aspect in his eyes; but he loved her all the same, and he knew it.

"Ah, no," he said, softly, "vengeance won't do any good. If she likes him well enough to marry him, nothing can undo that. You can't change the thing back again and begin anew; if she has gone

so far as to let him write letters to her like that, stopping the marriage won't do any good."

Mrs. Glencairn was appalled by the effect the news had had upon him. He was utterly struck down. She began to wish herself away, or that she had confided her incoherent protest against the marriage to a less interested person. So she made some feeble excuse about her having come to inform him as a duty; and breathed more freely when she was out in the open street.

No sooner had she gone than the young man abandoned himself to the most violent paroxysms of grief and jealousy. The first blow of the intelligence had merely stunned him; and now that the departure of Mrs. Glencairn seemed to leave him to his misery, he gave way to all the bitterness and agony of his position. His first

action was to go to a drawer and take from thence a large heap of letters to fling them into the flames; but on opening the drawer his glance fell upon a photograph, slightly coloured by himself, of that beautiful head, with its speaking eyes and too well-known features. He caught up the miniature, looked at it with a gaze that seemed to seek for the horrible mystery of treachery behind that fair and innocent young face, and then he burst into the unutterably bitter tears of a grown man. Recovering himself from this emotion, he carefully and quietly, as though he was burying some sacred relic, laid the portrait again on the heap of letters, and closed the drawer. There was a different expression on his face as he came away.

"It is not she who has done it," he said, and his teeth were clenched. "If God does not blind the eyes of that man

that first looked on her and prompted him to go after her and ruin her, where is the justice of Heaven ?"

His face was now, for the first time, pale and determined. He shook back the thick light brown hair that had fallen over his forehead, put on his hat, and walked downstairs and into the street.

A friend passed him, nodded, and said, "Good afternoon." Charlie did not see him, but afterwards looked back, and seemed to recollect that some one had addressed him. His next adventure was more dramatic. Walking erect, with his white, impassable face and vague eyes fixed blankly upon nothing, he ran against a small crossing-sweeper, who yet lingered on his beat, and the little fellow was knocked over. Hastily turning, Charlie picked him tenderly up, gave him a handful of loose coppers and shillings—all the

money he possessed—and said, "For God's sake, don't cry, my boy; I didn't mean to hurt you."

"If you'd seen him when he said it," said that little boy to his companion, some minutes afterwards, "you'd ha' said as he was more like to cry hisself."

In this determinate, absent way did Charlie Bennett walk all the way—rapidly enough—down to the Temple; and there, with his face harder and firmer than ever, and with an almost imperceptible dilation of the nostril, he ascended to the first floor of one of the buildings, and knocked sharply with his knuckles on a door which bore, in small, white letters, the name of "*Mr. C. Helstone.*"

CHAPTER VIII.

COLD WATER.

HELSTONE sat in his room, alone. He had just returned from doing what he could to help Mr. Morrisson, Glencairn's head clerk; and as he lay back in his easy-chair and lit a cigar his thoughts naturally reverted to the position in which he saw only too clearly that the botanist's family would soon be placed.

"I must try to save for myself that girl out of the general wreck," he said to himself, "and I suppose, to satisfy her scruples, I must marry her and become orthodox and go to church with her. It

will be better so. The gentle hypocrisy will cost me nothing; while, if I educate her to accept my beliefs, if I take away those conventional rules of guidance without which women become devils, she may compromise my peace as well as her own. And what an amount of idealism she is already throwing round my life! I am rising to a conception of the disinterested. Yet she is not the sort of woman I could have wished to marry, if it weren't that men, by a law of their nature, prefer beauty to brains. In time the human race must become universally beautiful, and universally stupid. Just now many men marry ugly women—because they can't get pretty ones; but, as the natural tendency of human nature is to select the prettiest types in preference to all others, it follows that in what Alfred de Musset calls an eternity or two, the human race must develop into a multitude

of godlike idiots. *Bien*, I will give my little help to the good work."

At this moment Charlie knocked at the door.

"Come in! What, you, Charlie! Come along, lad; I want to talk to you of the Glencairn family—their affairs are in a frightful mess——But what the devil is the matter with you?"

White and speechless Charlie stood opposite the man who had wronged him. All the tempest within him struggled for utterance in word or deed; and yet at the very moment, in the sharpest bitterness of his indignation and sorrow and hatred, a sense of his own utter weakness paralyzed him. Not physical weakness—he could have sprung upon this man and crushed him out of life,—but the weakness of one who faces the irreparable, and knows it to be irreparable.

"I do not come here as a friend—no, thank God, that degradation is spared me. One doesn't call the man a friend who betrays him, who goes behind his back and robs him of all he cares for on the earth, who——"

"My dear fellow, what is it you mean?" said Helstone, blandly; but at the same moment he darted a quick glance to a small silver-decorated pistol which lay on the mantel-piece.

"You know what I mean, liar and coward! Lies are not told by the lips only—you went and ensnared this wretched girl while you pretended to be her father's friend and mine. How long ago is it—two or three days?—that you ridiculed her to me, and imitated her childish ways, and said she was not fitted to be the wife of a serious man. You have lied to her, too, or you never dared have written to her

as you do—you have blinded her eyes, and she believes you to be a moral man and a Christian gentleman. Before you asked her to be your wife, did you tell her what sort of a husband she would have—one who believes in neither God nor man, in neither heaven nor hell, not even in the the existence of the commonest moral instincts ?"

Helstone rose.

"I have had enough," said he, calmly; "if you continue, I will throw you downstairs."

"You had better not make the attempt," said Charlie, who physically was greatly the superior of Helstone.

"Then, by God, I will kill you."

He snatched the pistol from the mantelpiece, and cocked it. Charlie seized it, wrenched it from his hand, and threw it contemptuously on the floor. The charge

exploded, and the bullet went through the window, leaving a clear round hole in one of the upper panes of glass.

"Bah!" said Helstone, with a look of tired vexation, as he threw himself into his chair, "have your will! I don't know what you want. I suppose you came here to use your superior muscles as a means of bullying me—very well, do it!"

"I came here to see if you had a little conscience left. I came to tell you what I thought—what every honest man will think—of your conduct. I came to appeal to what sense of honour you have left to undo the wrong you have done this girl, to tell her who and what you are, to give her a chance of taking this step—if she will take it—in daylight and not in darkness. I tell you, Helstone, I did not believe you capable of this thing, however much I may have thought of the natural consequences

of your way of thinking; I believed you had some conscience—some sense of honour——"

"My dear fellow, why do you set up your own standard of conscience to judge me by? My conscience is different from your conscience; that is all. My conscience coincides with my belief, and I act upon it: what more would you have? I know a man who is a devoted Pantheist, and he is trying just now to secure a contract for the conveyance of the sewage of some place or other in the North. I pointed out to him that a Pantheist ought to shudder at the blasphemy of throwing dirt into the sea; but his conscience was the conscience of a common and vulgar-minded Christian, and he did not heed me. Very well. I have given up my old conscience. I know and am convinced that Miss Glencairn, should she

marry me, will better secure the comfort of herself and her parents than if she married you."

There was a strange look on the young man's face as he heard these words—no more a look of anger, but of one vague bewilderment and unutterable sorrow. For the first time there flashed across his mind the terrible thought that he had no paramount claim upon Fanny—that she was free to go away from him—that it was possible she might go away. He seemed to forget Helstone's presence. The little bit of sky and cloud visible from the window was now being touched by a warm glow; and as he looked faintly and wistfully upward his pale face caught a tinge of the yellow fire. Helstone regarded him as one might regard the figure of an Apollo, recognizing there the grand simplicity, the perpetual youth

that the Greeks loved to transfuse into their marble.

"Her heart will never forget this man," Helstone thought, "will never cease to throb at his approach. If I had but his splendid strength, and his comeliness, and his magnificent freshness and tenderness of heart, would I barter them for all the intellect in the world?"

Despite himself he was touched by the position in which Charlie now found himself; and although he could not realize to himself all the unutterable horror of this first glimpse into the possible future, he knew that there was a terrible suffering within that blank, bewildered exterior.

"Sit down, Charlie," he said, in a kindly way, "and let us talk it over. First tell me where you heard anything of the matter."

"Mrs. Glencairn brought me a letter of yours to Fanny."

"Oh, that was the letter I sent yesterday, with a short essay on mothers-in-law in it. Precisely. Well, I say nothing of her opening the letter: I dare say that is part of the creed of a Christian conscience. Indeed I've known excellent Christian women who were not above writing anonymous letters, and telling fibs, and similar little devices in similar cases. Very well. That letter, as you know, contained no acknowledgement that Fanny had promised to be my wife. It took the matter for granted. In fact, she has made no such promise—she has, on the contrary, maintained to me that she will marry you."

Charlie looked up, with a hot flush on his cheek.

"And yet you dare to write such a

letter to one who tells you she is engaged to be married!"

"Why? Because I believe she will marry me, and I desire to accustom her to the idea. Am I revealing my system to you? Such is my candour."

"It is the candour of a housebreaker who shows his tools after the house has been robbed."

"Not at all. Fanny Glencairn is free to marry either of us two, or neither, to-morrow morning. We both wish to marry her; and when I use every means in my power to please her and gain her consent—even as you do—why should you come and insult me in my rooms? What good is that likely to do? You cannot alter her mind by breaking my neck. This is the nineteenth century, Charlie; and we are reasonable. We don't find a woman nowadays who will gladly marry

you as soon as you have shot all the rest of her lovers. We despise women just now, and they know it. We doubt their possession of anything but conventional virtue; we have no great opinion of their intellect; and we have come to regard marriage as a necessary penalty to be paid in certain cases. I say, women know all this; they have their revenge if they are pretty enough to lay hold of two or three lovers; and in the end they exact the penalty from one of them—generally the richest. Marriage is a sacrifice upon the altar of society; and women are the high-priests of society. In your case, the thing is impossible. Society demands that you should spend the best years of your life alone; and permits you to marry only when the long struggle for position is over, when you are middle-aged, indifferent, and weary."

"It is too true," said Charlie, sadly.

He, also, was falling under the spell of the charmer. He began vaguely to feel that he had wronged Helstone. He began to envy him his calm, intellectual serenity, his indifferentism, his worldly wisdom. It was not Helstone, then, who was causing this trouble: it was the world, it was society, it was feminine nature that had produced this dumb regret and inquietude in his heart.

"What you say is true—God help me!" he murmured. "I have no right to ask a woman to marry me. Many a time, though, I have thought that if I could find a woman who had my capacity of loving, who had the same views of things that I had, she might not be unwilling to share my struggles and look forward, as I look forward, to a time which would

recompense us both. And I fancied, too, that——"

But he dared not allow her name to pass his lips; though Helstone knew whom he meant.

"My dear fellow," said Helstone, kindly, "the picture you draw would be comfortable for you; but would it be so for your wife? You have the most powerful idealism in you of any man I know: you would believe any woman with soft eyes capable of reaching the heights of disinterestedness and self-sacrifice on which you exist. I never met such women. They may exist: I never met them. And even suppose you got some young girl to share that studio of yours, how about the children that would follow?—for I don't suppose you mean to live in France. You see I

talk commonplace; but all the wisdom of life is commonplace. Commonplaces are thrown aside because people do not catch their full import; for the mass of mankind are like infants—if you keep talking to them, they will imitate and in part understand you, but at no time do they entirely comprehend what you say. Preach a thousand years upon the misery of poor marriages, and you produce a commonplace: your last hearer will go and marry upon five hundred pounds a year a girl who has been accustomed to the living one gets at a thousand a year; or he will go and, with fifteen shillings a week, marry a girl whose father makes six or eight pounds a week. In a year they will probably have reason to bless those little arrangements which, to preserve the fine moral tone of society, compel two people who hate the sight of each

other's face to live a lifetime together, in the same house, at the same table, before the same altar, where they are supposed to offer up thanks for heaven's mercies."

Charlie was silent and sad. In truth, his heart was far away from this disquisition. He knew many a rare and noble exception to what Helstone would make the rule of womanhood; but he did not dare to speak. He was thinking only of that one sweet face—thinking how it would have lit up that poor home of his, how it would have cheered his weary labour. Was it possible that all the demons of hunger, and poverty, and sickness could ever bring him to look upon those eyes but with a strange and loving kindness? and if his darling was as tender-hearted as he knew she was, why should he fear, either, for her? He seemed to listen mechanically to Helstone, and to agree with him; and

yet his heart was busy knocking down the frail barriers of prudence which his companion was endeavouring to place between him and Fanny.

"You don't know anything of the tenderness of women's hearts," he said, at last. "I have seen Mrs. Glencairn—and she does not seem a very impressionable sort of woman—I've seen her crying till the tears ran down her cheeks as she told me of the little boy she lost while he was being weaned—of her walking up and down at night in front of the house where the nurse lived; and of her seeing, one clear, moonlight night, a strange white glimmer in the air just over the window. You have heard the rest? She ran upstairs—there was only the nurse there, struck dumb with terror, for the child had died in her arms but a few seconds before, and she had just laid him on the bed."

Charlie did not add that on the night when Mrs. Glencairn told him the story, hers were not the only wet eyes in the room.

"Very natural," said Helstone, with a faint smile. "Throughout the whole animal kingdom the mother's love for her young is only equalled by her indifference for the father."

Charlie rose, and took his hat.

"You'll forgive me, Helstone, for my rudeness to you when I came here. I had not reflected. I suppose no one can help what has happened; and, as you say, quarrelling between us won't mend matters. I will see her, and she shall decide."

"There," said Helstone, as the door closed upon him, "there goes one of the finest fellows upon God's earth, and likely to be one of the most unhappy."

On leaving the Temple, Charlie crossed Waterloo Bridge, and made his way to Glencairn's house. There was a cold fear resting upon his heart; and when at length he came within sight of the house, he paused. Dared he venture to ask her, upon this waning afternoon, to dispose of his whole after-life? Would it not be better to take some more auspicious moment?—when, perhaps, he had induced her to go out for a little walk with him? He turned and looked northward. A blank grey mist was falling over the great city; and the golden points of the gas lamps were beginning to tell in the twilight. He thought of the long journey up to his home; of the dull, solitary evening; of the night that would only be a terrible night of torture if he had not the courage to enter and discover the worst. The next moment he was at Glencairn's door.

Mrs. Glencairn was surprised to see him. She was sitting sewing. Fanny was at the piano, which she immediately shut on his entrance. She received him politely and distantly, as if he had been an ordinary acquaintance. She looked grave, and almost sad; and this touch of reserve—rather an unusual mood for her—only made her the more lovely and interesting in the young man's eyes. His look followed her about the room. He observed the matchless symmetry of her figure; he saw the involuntarily graceful way that her small, soft, white hand smoothed the table-cover, or lifted a reel of cotton; and then, as she sat down near the fire, turning her face from him, he could only catch a glimpse of the profile of her rounded cheek, and admire that beautiful neck, which was only partially hid by the pale rings of hair. The quiet-

ness of her demeanour, icily cold as it was to him, pleased him. There was no more of that puzzling, tantalizing coquetry or childishness about her manner.

"If I could only get five minutes' talk with her now," he thought, as he sat there, almost silent; with his eyes softly and wistfully watching her least movement.

Charlie was rudely awakened from his reverie. Mrs. Glencairn, as he speedily saw, had been attacking Fanny on the subject of Helstone, and to his horror he found himself being dragged, before Fanny's face, into the discussion.

"What do men do when they discover the perfidy of a friend? What would you do if you found one whom you had trusted and admitted to your house turn round and deceive you in the grossest manner?"

"If you'll tell me who it is——" stammered Charlie.

"What would you do in such a case, I ask? Would you not horsewhip him? We women can't do that. And yet look at what this man Helstone has done."

Fanny rose.

"I desire you to stay, Fanny. It is better I should tell you at once what I think of him. You brought him here, Mr. Bennett; and you know we received him as your friend, and treated him as a friend. Since that moment everything has gone against us. My husband lies in that room there—who did that? At a critical moment, when everything depended on the business being looked after, the head of it is taken away by this man. Then he offers to repair the loss by going himself. What good has he done? Our affairs are irretrievably shattered; and now, with no

one to lend us a hand, at the moment of our deepest misfortunes, his own misconduct — his own treachery — compels this man to abandon the little service he was doing us. Were we not happy enough when he came amongst us a few months ago? And now there is nothing but discord, misery, and a prospect of the workhouse for all of us."

"I am very sorry," said Charlie, humbly, "if I have been the cause——"

"My poor boy," she said, "you are not to blame. He deceived you as he deceived us. You have always been our friend—at least I can answer for it you have always been the friend of my poor husband and myself. As for my daughter — she has profited doubtless by his wise and disinterested teaching, and is ruled by other ideas than ours."

Fanny rose to her feet, with proud tears

in her eyes. Without a word to either her mother or Charlie, she swept by them both, and entered the small room where her father lay in bed, reading.

"What is it, my girl?" said the old man, gently.

She ran forward and buried her face in his bosom, crying and sobbing bitterly.

"What is it, my darling?" he asked, patting the little curly head.

"They are both so cruel to me," she sobbed.

"Who?"

"Mamma and Charlie."

"No, no, no. Surely not. Tell me all about it."

To appeal to her imaginative faculty was the way to reach the least beautiful part of the young girl's nature. Had he continued to caress her, and pet her, and sympathize with her, her heart would have

responded to his kindness with a touching simplicity, a childlike guilelessness and truth. But he appealed to her brain; and that subtle, dexterous organ at once produced a little sketch or story which painted the conduct of Helstone and herself in rainbow colours, and half suggested the mamma and Charlie as demoniac shadows in the background. Old Glencairn listened patiently and compassionately.

"Very well, my girl, sit down here and read to me. Here is a description of the world in its earliest stages that will interest you like a romance."

She took the book and sat down. She turned over a few pages, then threw the book on the bed, and put her arm round her father's neck.

"You will defend me against them all, pappy, will you not? Suppose they all come together, to eat me up, then you will

rise and take a big sword and shield—a metaphoric sword and shield, as Mr. Helstone would say—and rescue me? Shall I be Andromeda, or Medea, or who? For you know, pappy, I don't care the half for any one of them that I care for you."

"Hush, Fanny; you mustn't talk that way about your mamma."

But who could be displeased with this bewitching creature, especially as the little mouth was put forward to kiss him? She betook herself once more to the book; and began, in a grave voice, to say that "At this period, when the sun's rays were scarcely sufficient to pierce the vast swamps which harboured," &c.

Charlie only saw her once again that evening, when he went in to see the old botanist. He was subjected during the remainder of the time to the complaints and bodeful anticipations of Mrs. Glen-

cairn, who now professed the warmest friendship for him, and who had come to regard Helstone as her bitterest enemy.

Scarcely knowing what he did—ready to burst out into incoherent blasphemy or into equally useless tears—he looked into Fanny's eyes as he held out his hand in bidding her goodbye. They were cold and grave. He shook hands with her; and, without a word, passed downstairs and out into the cold dark air.

A faint reflex of lurid light lay over the city, telling of the brilliant streets and the swarming life beneath. Could not he plunge into this wild struggle, and fight, and die without further agony of regret or of torturing hope?

CHAPTER IX.

TEMPTED OF THE DEVIL.

CHARLIE did not do much work the next morning. He turned over those old canvases of his; and never had their vague suggestions of pictures, their efforts this way or that way into the region of the ideal, seemed such utter failures. He tried to smile as he saw, in one or two of the completed landscapes, the initials F. G. cunningly interwoven with his own through the medium of a bit of grass or a stray bramble.

He was interrupted (having spent the best part of the forenoon in this aimless

way) by the sound of a heavy, regular footfall on the stair; and the next moment his door was opened, and Major von Kirschenfeld walked in. What a picture he was of health, and activity, of a green old age and cheerfulness of spirits, this tall, white-haired soldier!

"Still here, Charlie? What a life you lead! Have you taken your breakfast off that dirty tray, with these old blue cups, and the iron spoons, and——gur-r-r-r! what a girl to bring any one's food upon the table! Come out of this, you poor Dummkopf! Come, pack up your things, send them to the railway station, and then go down with me, and you—you make portraits of the seashore for the next fortnight. My canary-bird is there; I come not back to London before the winter is here in good earnest. Was? It will arise you out of your sleep—come!"

Charlie rose, with a big flush on his cheek.

"Herr Major, there's nothing in the world I'd like better. I can't work here; I am getting sick of London; but—but——"

"But you want money to pay your fare, or pay your lodgings here? Natürlich. Then I will buy one of your pictures—this one."

He pointed to the nearest one—*which* was rather a matter of indifference to the old soldier.

"I can't sell you that one," said Charlie, "that is ordered, with three more, by a lady. No, I don't know who she is. Besides, I don't want charity; let me paint you a picture of Wrexhill when I get there, and give me five pounds of the money now."

Glad to forget for the moment his dis-

quietude in action—desirous of getting away from London—Charlie was not long in packing up his smallest easel and a few canvases, which he had sent down to Charing Cross Station. His colours he took in his hand.

"Now I am at your service."

I do not know whether this visit of the Major's was part of a deep-laid scheme; but the old gentleman seemed determined to impress upon Charlie the exceeding happiness and delight of having plenty of money, and the horrible ignominy of having none; accompanying his panorama with sundry moral disquisitions. Charlie stepped into the private hansom which was waiting at the door; and the Major bade his man drive to his club. On the way he asked Charlie if he wished a cigar. There was a support for the arm on each side of the low, broad hansom, covered, like the

rest of the inside of the vehicle, with dark green velvet. He pressed a spring, and the top of this arm sprung up, revealing a long, narrow box, which held some cigars, a meerschaum, tobacco, vesuvians—in short, everything that a smoker could desire.

Arrived at his club, the devil and his pupil had a quiet little luncheon of clear turtle soup, cold chicken *aux champignons*, some fine grapes, and a bottle of Beaune. There being still an hour and a half to spare before the train left for Wrexhill, they jumped again into the cab; and while Charlie, in place of his ordinary oily brier-root, was encircling his face with the divine perfume of an old Partaga, they drove to Hyde Park.

Now to complete the ruin of any modern Faust, Mephistopheles has only to take him to Rotten Row. If he can

survive that ordeal, and go home to his study, or his poor lodgings, or his shabby home without feeling the least bit of desire to have money, and to be highly respectable, and to have the acquaintance of those robust young girls who are growing up to be the finest womanhood in the world, then I say that this Faust is incorruptible, and the devil may go and fish for other fish.

Charlie, who might have said with his prototype—

> "Vor andern fühl ich mich so klein,
> Ich werde stet, verlegen sein"

plucked up a little courage as the Major and he ordered the cab to wait for them, and proceeded to walk up the Row. Indeed, many a passer-by paused to look at the two men—the elder, tall and straight-shouldered, with those bushy

white moustaches and whiskers of his, well-dressed, and evidently known to many of the riders in the Row; the younger, with his fine florid face, soft brown moustache and whiskers, his loose hair and negligent dress, his small feet, and small hands, which were bare, but white and delicately veined.

"You know a lot of these people?" said Faust, timidly.

"That was Sir James Stokes, the big railway man, and beside him there was Lord ——."

"But who is she?" exclaimed the young man, looking towards a young girl whose profuse hair caught a bronze tinge in the hazy sun as she cantered lightly past.

"She? Oh, nobody. She is one of a whole family of beauties—her mother lives near me in Kensington, and the dear

heaven only knows how she will ever get one of them married, for there is not sixpence among them all. She is a nice girl, though—she comes sometimes to see my Marie."

And so they sauntered up and down; and at length drove to Charing Cross, where Charlie bade adieu to London and turned his face seaward.

The day was one of those in which autumn begins to tell of the coming winter; when there is a cold chill in the air, and red leaves flutter down from almost bare branches, and there lies a grey mist over the land through which the sun faintly sheds a pale coppery light. Out of that milky haze rose spectral trees and the spires of village churches; an undefined horizon lay all around the dim landscape; there was a sober tone of sadness over everything, which was not lessened, one may be sure,

by Charlie's private meditations. But as the express train rattled southward, passing wooded slopes, beautiful valleys, and far-off lengths of plantations, the air grew finer and clearer, here and there a bit of azure struggled through overhead, and at last, all at once, lying beneath the white strong sunlight, he saw the broad blue sea. That first glimpse of the sea, after long months or years of absence from it, I take to be one of the saddest sights in this world—sad no one knows why. Big tears rushed to Charlie's eyes as he looked out on the glorious vision; there was a strange humming in his ears as if he heard, miles away, the mournful monotone of the water; and then—he turned, of course, to think of her.

"If *she* were here," he said to himself; "if she were looking out there, over the great plain of blue that seems to lead no-

whither, would not she be touched by its unintelligible pathos, would not her heart warm to old memories?"

Marie was at the station, sitting in her uncle's barouche. Charlie felt rather embarrassed—he knew not why—as he went to shake hands with her, and to meet the smile of her clear, honest face.

"You have come to stay with us for a while?" she said, as the porter carried out the wrapped-up canvases. "I am so glad."

They drove off. This village of Wrexhill, through which they had to pass, is scattered irregularly and picturesquely on the summit of a small incline which slopes down to the sea. It has a wonderful old church, the spire of which crowns the hill; it has an old inn, an old smithy, a number of wooden cottages, and one or two modern houses.

"This place will look well in sunset," said Charlie, "if one goes down to the shore."

"It is too soon to think of work," said von Kirschenfeld, who was in great spirits, having all his little family around him; "you go first to get London fog taken out of your — your — wie heiszt das, Marie?"

"Out of your lungs, Charlie," said Marie, and at the same moment she bowed to some one who was on the road.

Charlie turned quickly, and saw a young fellow of about six-and-twenty raise his hat with the air of one who was on terms of easy friendship with the young lady. Kirschenfeld stopped the barouche.

"Will you dine with us to-night, Cheveley?"

"With pleasure," said the young man, as he came up to shake hands with Marie.

"My cousin, Mr. Bennett — Lord Cheveley. Will you bring your guitar with you to-night?"

"If I drive, I will."

"Now there," said the Major, as they drove on, "is a young man who lives—he is alive—he enjoys life. He is happy wherever he goes. You shall hear him at one time sing and play the piano, and you shall see him win the hearts of all the ladies in a drawing-room; then you find him astonish the young farmers when he go to shoot rabbits down there —lieber Himmel, how he can shoot!— and then you see him in his yacht, and see how he can dive and swim. He does not look like that, you say? Perhaps not. I do not admire his light hair and his white moustache and his thin hands—but that is his mother's fault."

Charlie heard plenty about the young lord—both from Marie and her father—before dinner-time arrived. There was nothing he could not do, nothing he had not done. He had stalked deer in the Highlands with Prince Arthur, when that very young sportsman could scarcely carry a rifle. He had been up the Finsteraarhorn. He could speak Italian like an angel. He had published a novel. In short, there was no polite accomplishment which he did not possess.

The moral of which, as more or less directly pointed by the old soldier, was that Charlie might have become a similar paragon, and earned the admiration of his fellow-creatures, had not downright wilfulness induced him to throw away his best chance in life.

A very beautiful house was that of the Major's, standing on the brow of a little

promontory which, a short distance further out, ran down into the sea in a succession of miniature terraces and cliffs. It stood about half a mile from the village; and was further separated from the main road by a long avenue of young lime-trees, which led to the outskirts of the garden. The house was on the side of the small enclosure which faced the sea; and when Charlie threw up one of the two windows in his bedroom, there rushed through the chamber such a splendid sea-breeze, such an odour of shell-fish and seaweed, and such a long, loud roar of waves from the shingle beneath, that for the moment he was quite bewildered and giddy. One does not meet with these tempestuous alterations of the atmosphere in the neighbourhood of Fitzroy Square.

He sat down at the window, and as the strong biting breeze lifted his rich

brown hair, and brought a sharp, keen colour to his face, he looked away out upon that stretch of water—here dark and purple, there faintly blue, with tiny specks of yachts or small vague shadows of ships crossing the long, soft lines of shadow and sunlight that lay near the horizon. The fineness of the picture that lay before him only produced a dumb sadness, and the waves that plashed on the banks of shingle between the rocks had only one message for him, as they seemed to murmur her name.

A few days thereafter Christian Helstone was looking upon the same scene, with somewhat different thoughts.

Marie now came to take Charlie through the grounds of their little estate, of which she held the practical direction. Little as she resembled her father in most things, she had inherited from him a true German

love of what we English call landscape gardening; and with much pride she showed him all her wonderful efforts in that way—the artificial plateaus, the fountains trickling over rockwork into circular basins in which lay a few big carp, the sloping terraces covered with the fine close turf which one finds only near the sea, the comfortable summer-house, sheltered from the wind, and half hidden by that American creeper which at this season of the year had burst into every hue of scarlet, deep crimson, and bronze. But there was a profusion of vegetation everywhere that redeemed the rather artificial aspect of the place. The fact is, she and Nature had had a stiff fight; and luckily Nature got the best of it so far as to break the trimness of the walks and the neatness of the turfed banks. Together, the two of them had produced

as perfect a little paradise as one could wish.

About half-past five Lord Cheveley drove up, and not only brought his guitar, but also a present for Marie in the shape of a rug for her pony chaise, composed of roe's skins which he had just brought home from the Black Forest. Lord Cheveley undoubtedly had been in the Black Forest; he had shot five or six bucks, the horns of which were now nailed up in his library; and he had actually brought these skins from thence to be made up by a man in Regent Street. But there was no need to say that the skins had been *purchased* in the Black Forest; for Kirschenfeld, never having been down in the south of Baden, was not aware that the skins of roe shot in summer are worthless. Marie, therefore, was entitled to value the rug

as having been the product of his lordship's personal skill.

When, an hour afterwards, they sat down to dinner (Charlie was much annoyed to observe that his companions had dressed themselves for the occasion, while he remained in his brown shooting-coat), Charlie had prepared himself to hate Lord Cheveley. Such an Admirable Crichton, he considered, was certain to be arrogant and talkative, conscious of his own merits, and of his condescension in allowing himself to be paraded before common eyes. On the contrary, his lordship was so courteously attentive to Marie, so unobtrusively goodnatured, and sensible, and pleasant, that Charlie, in spite of himself, instantaneously formed a liking for him. You could not have told that he had ever seen a percussion-cap, or held a tiller, or crossed the Channel, simply because he

made Charlie talk instead of himself, and contented himself with directing the conversation so that it might be agreeable to Marie.

"You're a good fellow," said Charlie to himself; "but how is it you're not married? You have plenty of money; you know how to please women; you have nothing else to do than choose: why are you not married?"

The next moment he fancied he saw a look of intelligence pass between his lordship and Marie; and somehow he did not like it. After dinner they all went at once into the drawing-room, and had some black coffee; after which Kirschenfeld and Charlie, with cigars and caps, passed on to the balcony outside, while Lord Cheveley remained in the room and opened the piano, at which Marie seated herself.

Was it the Patarga which made Charlie

think this scene so beautiful? Consider his position. It was a clear starlight night outside, and down beneath them they could hear the sad, low music of the waves along the beach. Here, beside them, and only separated from them by folding glass doors, through which they looked, was a warm-coloured, spacious, brightly-lit room, glittering with all the little elegances which Marie's fingers had placed there; and at the piano sat the young girl herself, while they could hear, in a softened and distant way, the wonderful and delicate pathos of the "Lieder ohne Worte." Then she played Croisez's brilliant and graceful fantasia called "Venise," which has the quaint notes of the barcarolle running through it like a thread of silk through a shawl; and then she sang—her companion singing a full, clear second—the ballad of the Lorelei, as

Silcher has set it in that simple, touching Volks-musik. Was it the charm of the music, or the subtler charm of the words, that drew Charlie's heart to her as she sang—

"Die schönste Jungfrau sitzet
Dort oben wunderbar;
Ihr gold'nes Geschmeide blitzet
Sie kämmt ihr goldenes Haar;
Sie kämmt es mit goldenem Kamme,
Und singt ein Lied dabei,
Das hat eine wundersame
Gewaltige Melodei"?

Or was it the charm of herself? He could not avoid admiring, even as an artistic study, that beautifully shaped head, the high, clear, gracefully rounded forehead, the oval face, and the large, brown eyes, that had quite a southern softness and depth. A hand was laid upon his shoulder, and he started.

"Of what do you think, Junge? Is my

little canary-bird not beautiful; does she not sing like as an angel? And is it not a quiet life here, without disturbance, with much comfort?"

"Yes," said Charlie, "it is a beautiful sort of life."

Kirschenfeld was delighted. He opened the glass casement.

"Marie, ring for a bottle of Clicquot."

"But I can't drink any more wine," said Faust, as he shut the casement again. "Look here, Herr Major, what you have made me drink. First, Amontillado with the soup; then Johannisberger—and I don't like it much, I confess—with the fish; then Volney, and that Baden wine, what do you call it?—Affenthaler—and then——"

"But you drink absolutely none of any one of them! I want now only something for our cigars; and I have no champagne

in pints. He knows nothing of the wines who keeps champagne in pint bottles. It is as bad for champagne as ice is for all wines except the champagne. Now you drink with me, Junge, and hold your peace."

By this time Lord Cheveley was singing Spanish songs and strumming on his guitar; and Charlie grudgingly confessed that he sang well.

"Throw away the rest of your cigar, Herr Major, and let us go inside."

Probably never before in his life had the old soldier thrown away the half of a Patarga and left a bottle of Clicquot unfinished; but on this occasion he was only too glad.

"You come and sing with Marie," said he. "Marie, your cousin will sing with you."

"Which?" she said [illegible] the Herr Major re[illegible]

"I never sang part of a duet in my life," said Charlie, "but perhaps Lord Cheveley——"

The Major, however, insisted on Charlie singing something or other; so at last he sung a droll little ballad of Beranger's which he had heard at a wild meeting of beer-drinking artists.

"Now, Herr Major," said Marie, "Lord Cheveley says he will play an accompaniment to any song you choose to sing. Will you try him with 'Der alte Barbarossa, der Kaiser Friedrich'?"

Blushing like a schoolboy, and straightening himself up in his chair, the old soldier began to sing the ballad in a loud, cracked voice, while Lord Cheveley did his [illegible] to follow him into the different [illegible] which he ranged. His lordship [illegible] pianist; and, this song [illegible] play a number of [illegible]

rattling drawing-room pieces of the ordinary English style, with a few lively scraps of the Offenbach school. Meanwhile Marie sat and talked with Charlie about what he was going to do next day. The Major regarded them affectionately, and flattered himself that the success of the first evening was marked and undeniable.

Before Lord Cloveley left, it was proposed that they should go up into the tower which formed the corner of the building, and show Charlie some experiments with a limelight apparatus, which was one of Marie's pet amusements. This tower was square, had two rooms level with the successive floors of the house, and a third at the top of the tower. [illegible] Kirschenfeld had fitted up very [illegible] a smoking-room. Or, to [illegible] who stood this apparatus, dealing four similar

chamber in the tower there was a door leading into an adjacent room. In the latter apartment Marie placed the candles with which she had accompanied her guests upstairs, so soon as the limelight instruments were fixed in order.

The effects were certainly very fine. The long shafts of light ran out to sea, and struck upon the dark water when the reflectors were altered; or they descended upon the rocks near at hand, and conjured up grinning phantoms out of the sharp outlines; or they smote here and there upon the trees in the garden until they glared out suddenly from the surrounding gloom. A deeper intensity of shadow haunted these shafts, and wherever they [illegible] wherever these spectral-like rocks [illegible] in the white rays—a blacker [illegible]n, and shut out all other

This limelight was to play an important part in the history of Charlie's life; but of that hereafter. At present it has only to to be said that this amusement of Marie's was the means of revealing to him a secret.

When they were ready to go downstairs, Charlie observed that Marie had something in her hand.

"Let me bring the candles," he said.

Without a thought, he stepped into that adjoining room, and saw that it was a large bedroom, beautifully decorated and adorned. As he lifted the candles from the dressing-table, some little objects lying there told him that it was further a lady's room; and he was retiring swiftly enough when he caught, in passing, a glimpse of a picture which hung there.

It was the picture sold to the lady who had ordered from the dealer four similar

subjects by the same artist; and here it was hung up in Marie's own room. The circumstance afforded Charlie food for some little meditation that night.

CHAPTER X.

JESSICA'S FLIGHT.

MRS. GLENCAIRN'S method of action was now prompt and decisive. Fanny now bidden, under pain of being locked up in her room, to cease all communication with Helstone; his letters, the handwriting being known to her, were returned unopened by Mrs. Glencairn herself; and, finally, the maid-servant was told not to admit Mr. Helstone, in the impossible case of his daring to call.

The cause of this domestic revolution was known to Helstone, but not to Fanny, who, trembling and frightened, fancied

that this conduct on the part of her mother was the result of some vague providential retribution dealt against her because she had slighted Charlie. Now the worst thing that can happen to a lover is to have an outsider try to convince his sweetheart that she has been in the wrong.

Charlie at the seaside, Helstone banished, herself practically a prisoner, what was this poor tender heart, which was always so desolate without companionship, to do? Fanny was too proud to acknowledge to her mother the terrible loneliness of her position. She brought all her resolution, all her newly-learned philosophy, all her charming wilfulness and courage—in short, all the power of her brain, to support this weak, fainting heart of hers; and having no one else on whom to expend her natural warmth of affection, she grew doubly loving towards her father, and

would sit for hours by his bedside, reading patiently to him scientific books which tired and perplexed her.

Of course this sort of thing could not last. The heart rebelled against being deprived of its ordinary fuel; and Fanny, promising to be ever so good, and ever so humble, and ever so grateful for the affection of a good man, wished and prayed that Charlie might come and solace her with his great and generous love. She sat and thought of him until the tears came into her eyes.

"Darling," she murmured to herself, "I have been too cruel to you. Come back to me, and I will tell you all the kindness that my heart feels towards you."

Two days she waited, and he did not come; at the end of that time there were strange thoughts—strange glimpses of exasperation, anger, and revenge passing through her brain. Her mother's cold-

ness no longer saddened her: it provoked a secret opposition which was soon to display itself in a marked manner.

When they were all in bed that night, she sat up in her own room, and wrote a long letter—to Helstone. She complained of the cruel usage she was suffering. She dared not stir beyond the door. She was not allowed to post a letter.

"Why is all this?" she continued; "why am I never to see you again? Was it my fault you came to the house? Oh, my dear friend, I never knew the value of your counsel and advice until I found myself entirely alone, with no one to befriend me, and without you to appeal to in the old comfortable way. What am I to do? It seems wrong that I should wish to act in defiance of my mother's wishes; but I cannot bear this loneliness—I cannot bear

it. I will do anything to escape from it—*anything*."

So she continued, through eleven pages, and added a brief note, showing how he was to have his reply conveyed to her. She then addressed the letter, put a stamp upon it, and went to the window. Their house was at the corner of a small terrace, and her bedroom looked out into the street which led towards Clapham Road. There was no one passing. She opened the window a few inches, and dropped the letter over: it fell upon the pavement, and lay underneath the broad glare of a lamp.

"If only a gentleman picks it up," she thought, "I am saved."

It was a policeman who picked it up. He scanned it all over, read the address, and put it in his pocket. Fanny, in a sad state of suspense, saw him disappear round the corner.

A flagrant act of disobedience on the part of the maid-servant ruffled Mrs. Glencairn's temper on the following day, and both her patient, tolerant husband and this young rebel of a daughter suffered accordingly. But Fanny only nursed her discontent; and with an uneasy satisfaction thought of the letter which the policeman had picked up. The policeman had been so far a gentleman as to post the letter; and at eleven o'clock that night Christian Helstone stood underneath Fanny's window.

He held a letter in his hand. She glanced down the street—no one could be seen—and in a moment her nimble little fingers were at work unwinding a ball of thread. In a few seconds the slender line, weighted by a crotchet-needle, was on a level with Helstone's hand; he rapidly affixed the letter he held; and presently

Fanny was towing up the precious despatch. Meanwhile Helstone remained below, walking up and down in the light of the gaslamp.

How eagerly she read those lines, and what a strange sensation crept over her heart as she did so! How respectful was this letter, how tender, and yet how urgently he besought her to break away from the domestic tyranny that enthralled her.

"To you," he said, "I can make an offer I dared not make to any other unmarried woman whom I know. Shall I do it—here on cold paper—without the chance of answering your objections as they rise? Fanny, darling, you know me. You can trust me. Why should the fear of the petty suspicions of petty minds prevent us doing what we consider and know to be right? Your mother makes your life at

home miserable: show her that you can find a home elsewhere. Come with me to-morrow morning: I will provide you with a couple of pretty rooms near the sea; I will leave you there and return to London, if you wish; or I will live in the village adjoining—whatever you decide; and who dare say there is impropriety in such an excursion? True, it seems to be impossible that two unmarried people may be a few days in each other's company without producing evil suspicions in the diseased minds of those whose only regard for honour and virtue is the mercantile one of respectability—but you, Fanny, you are too true and honourable a woman to fear the breath of scandal. Come! It will be a pleasant little excursion at this time of the year, when the woods are beginning to grow scarlet and orange. If your mother desires, after a few days, to have you back

again, you will be in a position to demand a fair treaty, and doubtless you will never again be subjected to a treatment which is only fit for a schoolgirl." *Et cetera.*

She gave herself no time to think. Her head was in a whirl—indignation at her mother's rigorous discipline, which Helstone had painted strongly, delight at being able to set the conventionalities at defiance, and take her revenge upon her mother in a way which would wound the proud, cold woman at her tenderest point—that is to say, her respectability—these and a dozen similar wild impulses now drove her on.

She took a pencil, and hastily wrote on a slip of paper—"*I will come. Be ready to-morrow morning at eight; and God bless you, dear friend!*"

This she folded up and dropped over the window. Helstone picked it up, read

the message, kissed his hand to her, and walked away.

Doubtless the reader will expect that he grinned as he disappeared and congratulated himself on his success. He did no such thing.

"There," he said to himself, "is the first woman I ever met who had the fearlessness to be honest to herself. Her education makes progress."

Fanny, before going to bed, busied herself in packing up whatever things she could readily find to take with her, and that in the smallest possible compass. I believe she was the first woman who (whether she had or had not the fearlessness to be honest) was ever able to put the necessaries for a voyage into one bag. She retired to rest, and slept well and comfortably.

Next morning a cab was driven up to

the corner of the street; and Fanny knew by a little signal that Helstone was inside. Her mother was yet in bed. The girl downstairs had passed out into the garden to fetch some parsley for the breakfast-table. Fanny, with heightened colour, slipped forth from her room, opened the hall door, and shut it quietly, and then, with her head hanging down, walked round to where the cab stood. Now, and for the first time, Helstone got out, assisted her into the vehicle, gave her bag to the driver, and then seated himself, pressing her hand silently.

"London Bridge Station," he said to the driver.

"What a brave girl you are!" he whispered as they rattled off.

But she could not speak. The warm colour had left her cheek; she was now pale, and trembled as if with excessive

cold. He could hear her teeth chatter as these strange shivers passed over her; and, alarmed beyond expression, he was for stopping the cab at once and trying if a short walk would revive her.

"It is nothing," she said, still trembling, as she placed an icily cold hand within his —"it is the—the morning air—or the fright perhaps."

He tried to produce a little warmth in her tiny little white hand by chafing it, but he only succeeded in cutting two of his fingers deeply with the edge of a ring that she wore. They drove to London Bridge almost in silence; Fanny making strong efforts to control and suppress the nervous shivering which had stolen the blood from her face.

"You chose a lucky hour," he said, cheerfully, though he, too, was a little

frightened by this singular attack; "the train leaves at nine."

"Where are we going?" she asked, in a low voice.

"You ought to ask me where *you* are going," he replied, coldly. "I shall accompany you only at your own request——"

A slight tinge of colour came to her forehead.

"It is not possible for me to make such a request. I do not see why you should not come with me, as you would if my mother were with me. And you know that I cannot go without you."

"Forgive, me, Fanny. I blundered. I meant you to understand only that I have performed an office of friendship towards you; and that I do not seek to force myself into your company. Very well—do

not be angry—let me say that *we* are going to a pretty little house near the village of Wrexhill, on the coast of Sussex. I haven't seen either the village or the house; but a friend of mine, who has lived in this house with his wife during the summer, tells me that both are charming, and strongly advises me to take the house for the winter. However, we shall see whether the place suits you or not; and if you like I will remain in the village and come and see you every day."

"What o'clock is it?"

"Half-past eight; and here we are at the station."

"Oh, I shall never be able to live through this half hour. I wish to be away at once—*at once!*" she said.

"Have you had any breakfast?"

"No."

"I thought not."

He led her into the Terminus Hotel, went upstairs to the large hall, and in a few minutes there was a comfortable meal placed on the table before them. The hot coffee brought back a little colour to Fanny's cheeks, and her small, delicate fingers began to lose their icy stiffness. And yet she trembled slightly.

"Is it not very cold this morning?" she asked.

"Not at all," said Helstone; "we are going to have an Indian summer after these early fogs; and to-day you will find the sea gleaming like a sapphire, and all the long line of coast as bright and yellow as gold. You have not seen much of the sea, Fanny?"

"No," she said, sadly. "Papa used to take me with him sometimes on those long excursions of his, and sometimes we got near the sea; but of late he has always

preferred to be alone. Poor papa! I don't think he has much happiness in this world."

"Yes, a little more sugar, please," said Helstone. "My father was a very different man—an active, practical man, who would have made an immense fortune had he not been engaged in the ruinous business of farming. However he had plenty of pheasants and partridges, some wild-duck in the winter, a few stray teal, and more hares and rabbits than he could shoot; so he was quite contented. He had an odd notion that it was his business to preserve the balance of nature in the little domain that he owned. He would only shoot weazels and stoats when too many partridge feathers were found lying about; he forbade us to shoot the dabchicks that swam about the river until he found that the trout in his favourite pool were

becoming scarce through having their spawn eaten; and I dare say he would have apportioned so many sharks to every thousand square miles of ocean if he could have managed it. He vowed extirpation only against cats; for these he considered wild animals subjected to an unnatural education. He used to ask how cats could ever have been fed on cows' milk, but for the intervention of human agency; and he was opposed to all such unnatural modes of living. He made a rule that three hawks were to be allowed to live in his covers; and——"

Mr. Helstone's reminiscences were abruptly cut short by a glance at the time-piece. He had to hurry downstairs, scramble for tickets, and was only in time to drop the guard a pecuniary hint that it might be as well to give them a reserved carriage. And pleased with the little

flutter, Fanny entered the carriage, ensconced herself snugly in a corner, and began to pull a pair of pale little gloves over her now burning fingers.

"And we shall see the sea?" she said, with quite a childish pleasure, as the train slowly moved off, "and the ships? and the long clear sky?"

"I hope so," said Helstone, smiling.

The very motion of the train seemed to delight her; and she looked out on the dingy suburbs of London through which they were swiftly passing, with bright glad eyes. Then they had the carriage to themselves; and she placed her tiny hat in the net-work overhead, and shook out her beautiful curls; and she took off her heavy cloak, and put on a delicate lace shawl which she tenderly and quaintly drew round her shoulders; and then she turned her large, soft eyes out upon

the horizon, that was now becoming clearer.

"Was it your father taught you all these strange theories about people and things that you have?" she asked.

"Oh dear, no. My father was the most orthodox of men. He cut his life according to a pattern shaped for him thousands of years ago. His life was quite Jewish; and he considered the Ten Comm ndments an admirable code of laws, though he thought they might have been a little more explicit about poachers."

They stopped at a station; and Fanny was curiously looking upon the people who bustled about on the platform, when a tall gentleman, with military whiskers, came forward as though he wanted to enter the carriage.

"Oh, don't!" she said, inadvertently, and with a charming gesture of appeal.

The man hesitated, looked confused, and passed on.

"Surely he did not hear me!" she said, with an expression of alarm which soon broke into a merry laugh. Helstone was delighted to see her in such good spirits; and did not cease to ply her with odd remarks, and suggestions, and anecdotes. The air which whistled through the carriage was now fresh and clear, the strong sunlight dappled the heights and hollows of the pleasant southern county, and chased shadows over the level fields, and beat dazzlingly on far-off windows, and even sent an occasional flash across Fanny's pretty face.

And as the train rattled more swiftly down the line, the more enjoyable became this wild, mad trip she had undertaken. There were no dead pauses in that pleasant excitement of talk; for her nimble

wits, as Helstone had already discovered, were quite a match for his easy dexterity; and he had no fear that anything he might say would puzzle her. He fenced with her in these happy suggestions with a keen, enjoyable relish; and whoever imagines that he wished merely to keep her from thinking of what she had done ought to have seen the quiet happiness of his expression, and have heard the delicious, indifferent indolence of his voice. She lost the decorous smile of Clapham, and her merry laugh rang through the soft rumble of the wheels. Of course there were pauses of deep, quiet, comic gravity, during which both looked earnestly out of window, and appeared to try to forget each other's presence. And then some chance remark of Helstone's would again drag her into some assumed quarrel, until she came to tell him that there was no

use in her endeavouring to put him right, because there was really nothing in the world which he would, even for argument's sake, believe.

"And there are some things which everybody must believe," she said.

"I don't think so," he retorted.

"Everybody must believe that he or she lives."

"People have doubted that."

"At least everybody believes that two and two make four," she insisted.

"Not at all," said Helstone.

"But I know everybody does," she said.

"But I know there are savage tribes who cannot count beyond three: what do you make of them?" he retorted.

Which led them into considering where the human being properly begun and ended in the scale of animals; a subject

on which Helstone had a good deal to say which it would be injudicious, for many reasons, to repeat here.

But as they neared Wrexhill, a constrained silence fell over her, and Helstone saw that she was reflecting on the gravity of the step she had taken. He knew too much of feminine human nature to seek to distract her thoughts; instead, he followed her into the labyrinth of doubt whither she had wandered.

"You are a little afraid," he said.

She started, and looked at him.

"Why should you be?" he continued. "Your own conscience tells you that you have done no wrong, that you are doing no wrong."

"If I had only your courage to believe my conscience," she said, in a low voice.

"Courage? You are the most coura-

geous little woman on the face of the earth! I believe you would storm, single-handed, the Great Redan, if it were filled to the summit with mothers-in-law, old maids, and scandal-mongers; and that you would die waving your colours above your head. Courage? I believe you have the courage to be anything except a hypocrite, to do anything but betray your own sense of what is right, to utter anything but the social lies which the canons of respectability demand."

"But I," she said, "I am respectable, am I not? I have always tried to be very respectable."

Helstone laughed; but there recurred to his mind at this moment a strange suspicion that had once or twice been forced upon him — a suspicion that this timid and gentle creature had a brain which not only grasped everything which

he laid before her, but which also fooled him and mocked him under a garb of sly simplicity. But then, again, he thought of her undoubted tenderness of heart, of the touching way in which she strove—and he saw how well and honourably she strove —to remain faithful to poor Charlie; and he concluded that a woman who was so loving, so generous, and disinterested, could not defy him to his face and laugh at him from under a transparent veil of affected guilelessness. Having half-reasoned himself out of the suspicion, he looked into her bright eyes and on her sweet face; and there was an end of his doubting.

"The sea!" she cried, clasping her hands, and looking out of the window upon the long white and purple bands that lay along the horizon. "Just the same as it used to be long ago—still, and

quiet, and beautiful. And I can see ships —look out there! the tiny specks of grey —and—and shall we not go down to the shore, and sit among the shells, and dig our fingers into the sand, and taste the salt water?"

"Yes, of course," said Helstone; "and we will chase crabs in the pools, and gather bladder seaweed to crackle in the fire, and wet our feet defiantly just as we used to do. What is the good of microscopes, and books, and long words, and coloured plates? What is the use of trying to find out how we were created, when we know that we are created? You don't find a jelly-fish puzzling his head about the customs of his ancestors. He lives as he can, eats what he can, amuses himself as he can; and so let us. What do you say now, Fanny? Shall it be a house of shells or a tunnel

of sand, or an Irish round-tower of rock? I always preferred the tunnel myself; it required scientific construction; and it was not a religious symbol like the round-tower, nor yet a——"

"How you laugh at me!" she said, with a pretty smile.

"Indeed I don't," he replied. "Not for years have I felt such an insanity of boyishness within me. Nothing could hinder me from rushing to the sea, whenever we get there, and tearing my clothes, scratching my face, and getting myself soaked with water, if it were not that there was nobody ready to scold me when I got home. Without that, how can you do it? I have lost one of the rarest delights in life — that of cheating the power which is supposed to govern you. I have no master. I can tear my books if I like. I can buy as much toffy as I

please. I can get as many apples as I want without stealing them. I can purchase fine dress, and jewellery, and expensive bindings without having to run into debt; and so I don't care for toffy, or apples, or jewellery, or bindings."

"Let me be your mother," said she, "and I will scold you soundly if you wet your boots in the pools."

"Your scolding would be very pretty," he said, "but I should see you didn't mean it, and listen to it as we listen to the scoldings we receive in church about love of money, worldly ambition, and uncharitableness. We know that it is all a play, and that the scolder only says these things in fun; and so——But here we are at Wrexhill."

There was at the station only one shaky old vehicle, which Helstone immediately secured; and they drove through the quaint little village, and along the shore

road, until they had passed the entrance to Major Von Kirschenfeld's house, and had arrived at a cluster of three cottages, each separated from its neighbour by a bit of garden. At the first of these houses Helstone inquired for a Mrs. Jewsbury, and was forthwith taken into a parlour which was one of those museums of rare shells, peacock feathers, gilt prayer-books, dingy lithographs, stuffed birds, and photographic albums which villagers delight to form. Mrs. Jewsbury entered—a stout-built woman, with a broad, masculine, dark face and silvery hair—and Helstone said,

"The upper portion of your house is to let, is it not?"

"Yes," said the woman, fixing her dark, dull eyes on Fanny.

"My sister and I wish to take some rooms for—well, for an uncertain time;

by the way, I should say that Mr. —— has recommended me to apply to you."

"You may come upstairs and look at the rooms," said the woman, as though she were asking them to inspect a coffin.

To reach this upper storey they had to go outside and ascend a little stair which led to a small passage. As you entered the house by this lobby, there was a bedroom on either hand, the passage terminating in a large front room, occupying the entire length of the building, looking towards the sea, and with glass doors which opened into a very pretty balcony. Fanny, who had come up behind Helstone, looking very grave, not to say frightened, no sooner saw the view which this front room offered than she expressed her admiration in the most charming way. She opened the folding doors, passed out into the balcony, and leaned over the

front, between two pillars which were wreathed round with evergreens, thereby framing herself, as it were, in a border of green leaves. A rich beam of sunlight at this moment fell athwart the house, just catching the front of the young girl's figure, and wandering down her dress, until Mrs. Jewsbury, apparently astonished at the singular prettiness of the whole picture, suddenly turned with an inquiring look to Helstone, as if to ask him however he came to be the brother of this spiritual vision.

"How much are these rooms?" asked Helstone.

"Two pounds a week, sir, if you take them by the week," said the melancholy woman.

"What do you say, Fanny?"

"I think they're too dear," she replied, in a businesslike way that convinced Mrs.

Jewsbury of the fraternal relations existing between the two strangers.

Helstone went nearer to Fanny.

"But what do you say of our taking them?" he asked in a low voice; "you see that we can live here perfect strangers to each other, if you choose. If you prefer it, I shall take the rooms for you, and get others for myself in the village."

The young girl hesitated.

"I should be afraid to live here alone," she whispered; "what is the difference of your staying in the same house?"

"Very well, Mrs. Jewsbury," said Helstone, returning to the landlady. "My sister is so charmed with the view, that we have agreed not to quarrel about terms. Let me see, you will provide us with breakfast, and dinner, and that sort of thing? And how about wine?"

"There is an inn, sir, in the village——"

Helstone made a grimace.

"Public-house wine!"

"It's very good, I assure you, sir. There's the General that lives in that house over there, sir—General—I can't pronounce his name—has several times got claret from the inn when his own was out; and as for champagne, which it is only eight shillings, and you can read the name on the cork—now I do forget——"

"Collin, Clicquot, Rœderer, Moet, Pierr——"

"Moet it is, sir; and they say that the Prince of Wales hisself drinks it."

"Very well; let us have two or three bottles of the Prince's wine to try it—though if he drinks Moet and Chandon, he's a bigger—well, you can get these, and some claret, and some very bitter ale—*very* bitter, you understand?"

It is perhaps unnecessary to follow Mr.

Helstone further into the details of his household management. When he had finished, he found that long looking at the sea had produced a sort of mesmerism upon Fanny, and that she answered his questions absently, and with strange eyes.

CHAPTER XI.

IN LIMELIGHT.

THERE was a beautiful idyllic charm about these first few days of their stay at Wrexhill which quite won the heart of Helstone. He became another being in this delicious solitude, in this delicious companionship, which had for him the additional attraction of being inexplicably romantic, novel, and tantalizing. He forgot to be epigrammatic; sarcasm was far from him; instead, he wandered up and down the beach, drank in the soft melodies of colour and sound around him, and wove strange day-dreams over the fate of him-

self and of her whom he loved to call his maiden-wife.

There was something so fresh and quaint about this little adventure that he was in danger of apostatizing from his own doctrines. To get up early in the morning, to pace up and down in the meadows along by the sea until he could catch a glimpse of Fanny's figure in the common parlour, to return to a pleasant breakfast, with that too pretty face opposite him—why, it was as good as a play. There was a charm in the very way she tapped an egg; her pouring out of the tea was a work of art; and the dainty manner in which she ventured to cut bread for herself and for this absent friend of hers, who could never be taught to observe things at table, displayed so gracefully the well-shaped shoulders, the tiny wrists, the delicate, blue-veined fingers.

"If it could only last for ever!" she said.

"Why not?" replied Helstone; "I mean why should we not have it last as long as it can, without interference from us? These two days, I believe to have been the happiest days of my life. If anything should doom me to wretchedness for the remainder of my life, I can at least say, 'I have known perfect happiness. Good Madame Fortune, do your worst: you cannot deprive me of this memory.'"

"And I," she said, "I feel so happy and contented that I should like to have everybody like myself. I should like to have poor Charlie love somebody a great deal better than me; I should like to see mamma rich and well dressed; I should like to see papa with nothing to do but go on long excursions into the country and bring home little useless weeds. And I

should like to be the good fairy of them all, and sit upon a throne, and hand them all these things just to show what a very big heart I have got, and how many people I can hold in it."

"And to me—what would you give to me?" asked Helstone.

"You are perfectly happy already, are you not? You do not know how much I like you for saying that—for telling me that you care for me so much that to be with me is sufficient pleasure to you, without forcing me into a marriage. Why would not Charlie do that? But no; it was always 'Fanny, when shall we be married?' 'Fanny, don't you wish that the time of our marriage was near?'—as if it was marriage, and not me at all, that he cared for. Now I can't bear people who get to like each other running off immediately to get married, and binding them-

selves to like nobody else. It is very selfish and wrong; and looks as if they had no trust in each other."

"But some people," objected Helstone, though he was secretly pleased to see how his pupil could sublimate his own teaching, "require to take the temperance pledge of affection; or you might even call it the pledge of total abstinence, considering the ordinary result of marriages."

Mrs. Jewsbury declared that she had never seen a brother so respectful and attentive to his sister.

"Poor dear," she said, "although she looks so bright and healthy, and there's a glow on her cheek as fine as you could see, it's plain she's got a consumption from the way as he gives her his arm when they go out, and is so partickler at night about having her throat muffled up. Poor young thing!—no wonder he's fond of her, for I

declare when she smiles, and shows them glistening white teeth of hers, she gets round your heart somehow as if she was your own flesh and blood."

And Mrs. Jewsbury's daughter—a tall, rosy, goodnatured, soft-looking girl, who waited upon the two strangers—would sometimes stand in a vague and absent way, staring at the little delicacies of Fanny's toilette, and at the pretty way the tiny curls used to lie on the white neck. She was far too good a girl to have any idea of grumbling against Providence ; and yet one could detect at times a dull sort of regret in her big, soft, black eyes as she looked at the wonderful little hands, and the lace cuffs, and the pert necktie, and the hundred infinitesimal neatnesses of Fanny's figure and attire.

Once, being in Fanny's room when that young lady was dressing, she ventured

timidly to remark on what appeared to her the extreme beauty of the collar and neck-tie which were lying on the table.

"Do you think so, Sarah?" said Fanny; "come here, and let me try them on you."

Blushing very much, the big, pretty, gawky girl came forward, and in a minute or two Fanny's dexterous fingers had adorned her neck with the coveted bits of millinery.

"Now go to your mother and ask her how you look."

Highly pleased, the girl ran off, and in a few minutes returned.

"Mother is very angry," she said, "and says I should not have been so impertinent."

"Mothers always say that," remarked Fanny. "But never mind; you shall keep these little things and here is a small silver brooch to fasten the ribbon with. Now

run away like a good girl; and whenever you find that my brother is up, you may bring us our breakfast."

Perhaps I have not named a spontaneous and reckless generosity as being a marked trait in Fanny's character. I believe she would have taken off her shoes and stockings on a winter's night and given them to a beggar, had any beggar been bold enough to ask for them. As it was, her mother knew well that when Fanny went out shopping she never by any chance brought coppers back with her; and that, when no coppers were to be had, she would not only willingly dispense silver, but make frank claims upon the purse of her companion, whoever he or she happened to be at the moment. Have I not said that, wherever her heart was concerned, she was a true woman?

The novelty of this excursion to the sea-

side, and the constant recurrence of new aims—places to be visited, and so forth—prevented her, during the first two days, from thinking of anything else. But on the third day she grew somewhat meditative, and asked Helstone if there was no way of re-opening communication with her mother.

"Little as mamma seems to care for me," she said, "I'm afraid she'll be terribly put about by my disappearance, unless, as I fancy, she takes it for granted that I have fled for safety to my aunt in Chatham with whom I used to live. I know they will not tell papa; but still I should like to know if mamma is in trouble about it."

"Of course," said Helstone, "I knew our little excursion, wonderfully pleasant as it has been, could not last for ever: that it was merely a question of time as regarded our return. But I am in no

hurry to return—none in the world. I am depriving myself of a few guineas by being unable to do my ordinary work; but I am not dependent on that means of support. You say your mother will not be much alarmed——"

"I should be sorry to leave this place so soon," said Fanny, wistfully, looking away out to sea. "I do not know when I spent a happier time."

The heart of Helstone leapt up. Fain would he have chosen that opportune moment to press her to give him the chance of always studying her happiness as he had been privileged to do on this occasion; but he remembered ruefully the aversion she had displayed to any mention of marriage, and so he wisely held his peace.

"Let us remain, then," said Helstone. "The present is ours, the future may be

taken from us. And that reminds me that you have not told Mrs. Jewsbury when we shall have dinner this evening. Here I can dine at any hour; and I never knew the worth of dining until I dined with you. Make it, then, as early as you like, Fanny: in town I only dine late because the lateness of a dinner is the part of it that costs least."

"Sarah," said Fanny, "in the most natural and matronly way, "my brother and myself will take dinner at five"—and if Sarah had been an astute critic, she would have perceived something strange in the fact that Fanny always said "my brother and myself" instead of "we."

So the inevitable was postponed a few days longer; and the interval was spent in the full enjoyment of this delicious laziness. Singularly enough, they never encountered, during this time, either

Major Von Kirschenfeld or Charlie; a circumstance which may be attributed to the fact that Helstone and Fanny were in the habit of making daily excursions away from the neighbourhood; and that Charlie, instead of sketching around the coast, was engaged in painting a picture within doors, of which more will be said by-and-by.

The Major's house was about a quarter of a mile from that in which Helstone lived, and was plainly visible across the long and narrow downs that were dotted with sheep and furze. Several times Fanny and her companion had passed the entrance to the house, but they had never seen any one of the inmates. Lord Cheveley they had met frequently, for he often went shooting in the neighbourhood; and they had observed him more than once go in the direction of the Major's house with

a brace of partridges in his hand. They had also, by means of Mrs. Jewbury's telescope, been able to recognise him on board his yacht, as it coasted round towards Hastings; but they knew not who he was.

Helstone was speedily, and in rather a terrible way, to form the acquaintance of the young nobleman.

One evening Fanny had a slight headache, and retired to her own room about half-past eight. Helstone, therefore, having nothing to do, put on his hat and walked out into the clear dark night. He walked along to the village, and entered the inn; but the only company there—that of a few labourers met to drink porter—was not exhilarating; so he left, and returned by the road to the meadows in front of Mrs. Jewsbury's house.

The night was singularly fine, though

slightly cold. The stars twinkled crisply, and seemed unusually numerous; a great lambent planet lay softly within the deep blue, and produced a quivering reflection on the distant water; afar in the east the lamps of Hastings glittered like strings of golden diamonds, and here and there, out at sea, there were visible the green and red lights of some slowly-passing ship. A deep, dead silence hung over the meadows around him; a perfect and impressive silence that seemed to have hushed out even the murmuring of the ripples along the beach. Drawn by that irresistible fascination which the sea exercises upon a man's mind when it is in certain moods, he strolled leisurely down to the shore, or at least to the edge of the cliff overlooking the long, grey bank of shingle.

He sat and watched the great dark expanse of water, the twinkling vault

overhead, and the deep shadows of the rocks around him, until, despite himself, a vague feeling of superstitious fear began to creep over him.

"I hope my eyes are going to play no tricks with me to-night," he said, aloud; and the echo of his voice in that silence had an unnatural and ghastly sound.

He tried to shake off the feeling; and turned to the sea.

"And you," he said, "when do you mean to come up again, and kill us all off? See what we have done in these twenty or thirty million years you have let us alone. We have produced architecture, mathematics, musical science, and what not; we have built the pyramids, and done other wonderful things; we have evolved and improved the human race; and although our most costly scientific experiments are as yet only

devoted to furthering the old barbarism of mutual slaughter, still, in a few more thousand years, we should get rid, too, of that relic of our low origin. Or *are* you coming up? If you could come for half a dozen hours, and kill off the human race, leaving all the records of human civilization; and if you could produce another race—but what am I talking about! The next race might take a hundred million years to produce, and then be incapable of understanding a sundial."

It was a little cold, and he shivered.

"It is very hard," he thought, "that all the voices of nature should only murmur of death. Here am I in what may be the most beautiful time of my life. The only woman whose womanly nature and intellect I have been able to admire, and respect, and even to love,

is with me, apart from all other beings, giving me the sweetest and noblest companionship a woman may bestow. I have no particular cares, no lesser sorrows, to interfere with this pure friendship, this chaste and grateful love. I have nothing to desire—nothing. To me, at this moment, Fanny is near and intimate; but she is still within the halo of that idealism of maidenhood which transfigures her every thought and action. I am content that this existence should go on for ever; and yet, when I look out on the natural forces of the universe—these phenomena that give us our only notion of the everlasting—I see nothing, hear nothing but suggestions of death. The sea seems to be yearning to engulf me. The breezes blow as from the graveyard of long-buried nations. The trees rustle and sing something of the music of the

old, rude ballads that tell so mournfully of bygone men and women—death, death everywhere."

And what was death to this man? No altar of holy sacrifice, atoning for many faults, and transforming the poor actions of a commonplace life into a beautiful, sweet memory. It was a horrible pit, surrounded by devouring spectres, without light, without hope, leading nowhither.

A rabbit ran past him, and the slight rustle made him start and turn round, while his heart beat violently. He rose to his feet with a smile on his face.

"I don't see," he said, "why a rabbit should be able to make fire flash round my eyes, to make my heart thump inside my breast like this, and a shiver tingle through me. Animal magnetism may become a pest."

He began to walk along the narrow path by the edge of the cliff; and with a contemptuous inward sneer at his own weakness, he found himself stamping on the scattered bits of gravel to make as much noise as possible.

"I have a good mind to punish my impotent nervous system by compelling it to remain out here all night; but with what a sad face should I sit down to breakfast with my pretty Fanny!"

He continued his walk, savagely satirising his fears, and becoming, in spite of himself, more oppressed by that vague apprehension which seemed to people the dark voids around him with movable, conscious shadows. At last he became aware of a garden which lay before him, and a house, with a square tower rising darkly into the clear sky. In the perfect stillness he fancied that he could hear

voices issuing from a half-opened window which fronted a seaward-looking balcony; and the very echo of these human sounds cheered him and comforted him. His heart warmed towards the people who had exorcised the phantoms which his imagination had conjured up from the dark sea and the still deeps of the night; and willingly would he have gone up to that brilliantly-lit room, and shaken hands with tangible creatures, and rejoiced in the reassuring atmosphere of social sympathies. While he stood and listened, a dark figure appeared on the balcony, and seemed to look out on the broad, moving space of sea.

"Canarienvogel," Helstone heard this person say, "shall we try our limelight to-night?"

"If you like, Herr Major," said a

young lady, coming to the folding-door; "and Charlie will carry the lamp up-stairs."

"If they are going to have limelight," said Helstone, "I had better go."

And yet he lingered about; for the mere proximity of a human habitation was comforting in the solitude of that dark night. Then he began to calculate whether he had better try to take a short-cut home across the meadows, or whether he ought to return by the footpath along the cliff until he arrived opposite his own house. His inclination was strongly to choose the former; but knowing the cause of this inclination, he refused to obey the weakness; and, obstinately quarrelling with himself, he took the path by the shore.

He walked on a few yards, and every

moment he wished he had had the courage to obey his want of courage, as the gulfs along the cliffs became the blacker, and the wind howled with a more painful cry across the bare heath.

"That infernal sea," he thought, "moans as if it were death itself—hungry, ravenous. No wonder our first cowardly impulses were to personify these tyrannical forces, and seek to appease them by snivelling and genuflexion. They struck and buffeted and killed us all the same; and then we took to imagining higher powers, which were to take up our cause, and defeat our enemies for us. They are not defeated yet; but they will be. Our idealisms, being reflections of ourselves, were weak as ourselves. But Science is out in the meadows just now, working and and thinking; by-and-by the lad will come

up, with the flush of dawn on his face, to smite these brutal Goliaths that have so long affrighted us; and then——"

Suddenly he stopped short; his whole frame became rigid; he faintly tried to raise up his arms, as if to protect himself from some horrible sight or from some expected attack; and then, with a short cry that was half suppressed by his clenched teeth, he fell, stiff and straight as a stone effigy, upon the crisp heath, his face turned towards the cold starlight.

A woman, tall, and dressed in black, ran forward, looked at him for a moment in an irresolute way, and then, turning towards the edge of the cliff, made her way down by a break in the soft earth-banks towards some pools in which the reflection of the stars glittered. She dipped her handkerchief in the water, and,

holding it in one hand, scrambled up with the other towards the summit of the low bank.

But she had scarcely reached the top when she drew back. She had already been startled by a white light that flashed about among the dark waves, and had turned rapidly to see that in the window of an adjacent tower a limelight apparatus was the cause of the singular phenomenon. As her head came on a level with the greensward of the cliff, she saw that this blinding glare was turned full on the extended figure that lay only a few yards from her; and as she shuddered to perceive the ghastly whiteness of the face that was thus illumined, she heard voices talking loudly and hurriedly at the window in the tower.

She must have known then that the

people had seen the figure of the man lying there; and probably anticipating that they would immediately come to inspect the body, she slunk down towards the shore again, and remained hid under the projecting ledges of the cliff.

END OF VOL. I.

WYMAN AND SONS, PRINTERS, GREAT QUEEN STREET, LON.

00075479

Digitized with financial assistance from the
Government of Maharashtra
on 18 July, 2018